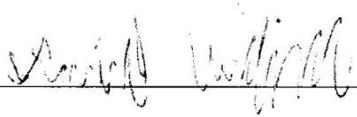


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Daniel Williford

Date 5/15/2011

# Colonial Representations, Post-Colonial Aspirations

French Cultural Policy in the Final Decade of the Tunisian Protectorate

1946-1956

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History Department

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts degree with

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This Honors paper Daniel Williford has been read and approved for Honors in History.

Dr. Jeffrey Jackson

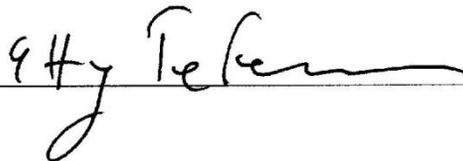
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## ABSTRACT

Colonial Representations, Post-Colonial Aspirations

French Cultural Policy in the Final Decade of the Tunisian Protectorate

1946-1956

by

Daniel Williford

In the Tunisian Protectorate, the phrase “cultural activities” referred to events such as artistic expositions, academic conferences, and literary competitions organized by a variety of associations which received backing from the French colonial administration. By examining in detail these cultural activities, sponsored primarily by the Bureau of Public Instruction in the decade before independence, this study demonstrates that through such events the government of the Resident General sought to propagate and promote a particular image of French culture among Tunisian elites with the intention of securing a dominant position for French art, language and literature in a post-colonial Tunisia. This image, which presented French culture as unified and diverse, continuous and dynamic, universal and superior emerged principally as a response to the new political realities created by the growing strength of Tunisian nationalism. In addition, assuring this privileged position for French civilization in areas where direct political control was being curtailed or abandoned altogether was a process directly related to Frenchmen’s negotiation of their own cultural identity in relation the rest of the world during the post-WWII era.

In his seminal critique of the colonial situation, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, the Tunisian writer and philosopher, Albert Memmi, makes the following observation about the colonizer's projection of his cultural identity:

The eulogizing of oneself and one's fellows, the repeated, even earnest, affirmation of the excellence of one's ways and institutions, one's cultural and technical superiority do not erase the fundamental condemnation which every colonialist carries within his heart....He will...call attention to the qualities of his native land—extolling them, exaggerating them—stressing its special traditions, its cultural originality. Thus, at the same time, he establishes his own share in that prosperous world, his natural tie to his homeland. Likewise, he is assured of the impossibility of the colonized sharing in its magnificence.<sup>1</sup>

Writing on the eve of Tunisian independence, Memmi recognized that the portrayal of the colonizer's culture played a crucial role in justifying his status while allowing him to situate himself in relation to the colonized. Through the representation of their art, language and literature, colonialists such as the French in Tunisia constructed themselves as the “custodian[s] of the values of civilization.”<sup>2</sup> A Tunisian Jew *de culture française*, Memmi's position reflected the ambiguous situation of educated Tunisian elites caught in between the cultural hierarchies of the Regency.<sup>3</sup> Throughout his career, he has provided insightful discussions of the cultural conflicts produced by the colonial encounter. During the period that immediately preceded the writing of *The Colonizer and the Colonized* when French art and literature embodied both the promises of French civilization and the assertion of its superiority, the efforts of the colonial administration to

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<sup>1</sup> Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* expanded edition, trans. Howard Greenfield (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), 56-58.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>3</sup> At the time of the installation of the French Protectorate, Tunisia was still known as the Regency of Tunis, a title which derived from the region's official status as a province of the Ottoman Empire. However, Tunisia had long acted as an independent political entity with primarily symbolic ties to the Sultan in Istanbul. As part of the French administration's plan to maintain the impression of internal autonomy in Tunisia, the Tunisian government continued to be referred to as the Regency. For further reading on Tunisia and the Ottoman Empire see Asma Moalla, *The Regency of Tunis and the Ottoman Porte, 1777-1814* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

encourage Tunisian elites' affinity for French culture had far-reaching political implications.

In the final decade of the Tunisian Protectorate from 1946 to 1956, the colonial state took on official responsibility for the representation of French culture in the Regency, developing a coherent cultural policy based on public academic conferences, artistic exhibitions, and literary competitions. Politically, this period was marked by France's attempts to refashion the image of its empire, by the acceleration and empowerment of nationalist movements in Tunisia as well as Algeria and Morocco, and by increased strikes and violence throughout the Maghreb. In Tunisia, the Neo-Destour Party, which had emerged as the largest nationalist party before the war, continued to lead the fight for full-independence.<sup>4</sup> Tunisian soldiers who returned home after fighting for France in WWII added fuel to the nationalist fire with their heightened political awareness and thorough disillusionment with the promises of French civilization. What Frederick Cooper describes as France's invention of "deracialized imperialism" with the creation of the French Union represented a last-ditch effort to salvage colonialism by extending limited citizenship rights to greater numbers of colonized individuals.<sup>5</sup> Ultimately, however, these reforms failed to appease most nationalist movements. Gregory Mann has also observed that many of the new policies under the French Union, "represented only window dressing on a continued system of racialist domination," which

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<sup>4</sup>After breaking off from the Destour Party, one of the oldest Tunisian nationalist groups, in 1934, the more radical Neo-Destour Party rapidly expanded its popular base becoming the leading nationalist organization in Tunisia. Kenneth J. Perkins, *A History of Modern Tunisia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 95-99.

<sup>5</sup>Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 173.

included attempts to reshape France's image as a "solicitous and accommodating empire."<sup>6</sup>

Though actual changes in policy were limited, the redefinition of the colonial relationship under the French Union in 1946 marked the beginning of a gradual shift in France's understanding of its international role. In this new order, Tunisia and Morocco were designated as "associated states," a phrase which appeared to acknowledge the possibility of approaching internal autonomy.<sup>7</sup> Following the failure of the 1947 political reforms in Tunisia proposed by the socialist Resident General, Jean Mons, it became increasingly clear to members of the French administration that additional concessions to nationalists were becoming inevitable.<sup>8</sup> The appointment of Louis Périllier to the post of resident general in 1950 with the explicit mission "to lead Tunisia toward independence" seemed to confirm the impression that Protectorate was being dismantled.<sup>9</sup> In 1951, the French adopted a reform plan that promised an increased administrative role for Tunisian officials while guarantying continued French control of Tunisia's defenses and international relations.<sup>10</sup> Then in 1955, after much negotiation and a series of violent clashes between Tunisian discontents and French authorities, nationalists and the colonial government reached an agreement assuring Tunisian control over all internal affairs.

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<sup>6</sup> Gregory Mann and Baz Lecocq, "Between Empire, Umma, and the Muslim Third World: The French Union and African Pilgrims to Mecca, 1946-1958," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27, no. 2 (2007): 368-396.

<sup>7</sup> Alice Conklin, Sarah Fishman, and Robert Zaretsky, *France and Its Empire Since 1870* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 251.

<sup>8</sup> The Resident General of France in Tunisia was the highest ranking civil official in the Protectorate and answered directly to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs. Within the Residence, his authority over the Bey and the Tunisian government was virtually total.

<sup>9</sup> Remark by Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, Robert Schuman. Cited in Charles-André Julien, *et la Tunisie devient indépendante...1951-1957* (Paris: Les Éditions Jeune Afrique, 1985), 27.

<sup>10</sup> Perkins, 121.

Shortly afterward, the escalating revolution in Algeria prompted the French to officially dissolve the Protectorate. Tunisia achieved full independence on March 20, 1956.

During this period, a veritable war of the arts was taking place as Tunisian artists, writers, and playwrights championed a “Tunisian cultural identity” closely linked to political nationalism.<sup>11</sup> The relatively small artistic and literary community of Tunisian Muslims maintained close ties to the Neo-Destour, echoing the party’s emphasis on reviving Arab-Islamic cultural traditions.<sup>12</sup> French authorities connected the intensification of Tunisian demands for independence to a growing hostility toward French language and culture in the Arabic-language press.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, the last decade of the Protectorate saw a sharp rise in the number of academic conferences, literary competitions, and artistic exhibitions sponsored by the Bureau of Public Instruction and Fine Arts. Particularly after 1950, officials frequently touted such events for their value as *propagande française* [French propaganda] and as a form of opposition to Tunisian nationalism. With a firm sense of the challenges that nationalism posed to French influence in an independent Tunisia, organizations under the aegis of the Bureau of Public Instruction particularly the Alliance Française,<sup>14</sup> mounted an increasing number of so-called “cultural activities” in the Regency.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 114-115.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 99.

<sup>13</sup>Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. Report, De Saint Paul, “Essai de Synthèse des diverses hostilités à l’action françaises, instaurée et poursuivie dans les territoires d’Outre-mer notamment en Tunisie,” May 1, 1950, Sous Dossier 5, Dossier A, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

<sup>14</sup>Founded in 1883, the Alliance Française (AF) was and is an international organization subsidized by the French government whose mission is to promote French language and culture worldwide. During the colonial period, the AF played a key role in establishing French language schools for local populations in colonized areas. For a study of the early years of the Alliance Française see François Chaubet, *La politique culturelle française et la diplomatie de la langue: l’Alliance française, 1883-1940* (Paris: Editions L’Harmattan, 2006).

<sup>15</sup>Letter, Jean Mons to Robert Schuman, 19 Avril 1950, Sous Dossier 5, Dossier A, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

This study will examine these expositions, conferences, and competitions supported by the French government in Tunisia from 1946 to 1956 in an effort to understand the representation of the colonizer's cultural identity at the end of the colonial period. The following questions have guided my research: What was the image of French culture presented to the Tunisian public in the final decade of the Protectorate? In what ways did this image reflect attempts by Protectorate officials to adapt to the slow dismantling of the colonial state? How might the vision presented in these events reveal a shift in the understanding of French cultural identity and a changing sense of France's international role among Frenchmen in the Tunisia? What was the relationship between the depictions of French culture promoted in activities sponsored by colonial authorities and events that focused on so-called "Indigenous Arts" or Tunisia's Arab-Islamic heritage? The ultimate goal has been to understand the political dynamics behind the official representation of the colonizer's culture, that is to say, how this image created by the colonial state responded to changing political conditions (such as the Tunisian nationalist movement and the push for internal autonomy). More generally, this study addresses the coherent (if at times contradictory) discourse on what it meant to be culturally French in the colonies and what this discourse tells us about the nature of French colonialism, particularly once decolonization appeared on the horizon.

In adopting a workable definition of "culture," it is necessary to distinguish between "culture" in the unconscious and lived sense and "Culture" as a construct, a project explicitly employed for political purposes. In order to navigate between these two related meanings, let us begin by considering two understandings of culture, one proposed by Clifford Geertz in his *The Interpretation of Culture* and the other by Edward

Saïd in *Culture and Imperialism*. Outlining both a definition of and an approach to analyzing culture, Geertz writes:

The concept of culture I espouse...is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative science in search of meaning.<sup>16</sup>

A historical approach based on Geertz's conception should focus on deriving meaning from the ways in which individuals make sense of certain events and actions in addition to the events and actions themselves. Addressing the question of whether we are to consider culture a form of practice or the mental framework which governs that practice Geertz points out:

Once human behavior is seen as symbolic action—action which, like phonation in speech, pigment in painting, line in writing, or sonance in music, signifies—the question as to whether culture is patterned conduct or a frame of mind, or even the two somehow mixed together, loses sense.<sup>17</sup>

A central focus of this project will be examining how members of the Bureau of Public Instruction were in the unique position of choosing which elements of metropolitan culture would be presented to the Tunisian public and of formulating a vision of French culture as part of a post-colonial project. This vision nevertheless constituted a system of symbols, a relatively coherent text that can be analyzed and interpreted. Geertz's description of culture as “webs of significance” as well as his method of isolating specific elements within this web and examining their connections and relationships can be applied to this study of the construction of French culture in colonial discourse. Since the object of this study is not metropolitan French culture itself, but rather how it was

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<sup>16</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 5.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 10.

represented, reflected, and reinterpreted in the discourse produced by Protectorate officials, our focus must be on how artistic productions took on new symbolic importance in the colonial context. Edward Saïd's reading of Matthew Arnold helps us narrow in on the one specific aspect of culture that will be the most useful for the purposes of this study:

Culture is a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society's reservoir of the best that has been known and thought....In time, culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state; this differentiates "us" from "them," almost always with some degree of xenophobia. Culture in this sense is a source of identity, and a rather combative one at that....In this...sense culture is a sort of theater where various political and ideological causes engage one another.<sup>18</sup>

This definition relates directly to the understanding of "culture" held by the French administration and reflected in official policy. For them, culture was the essential element distinguishing the East from the West, the basis for the hierarchies embedded in the colonial state, and the fundamental source of conflict threatening the continuation of French influence in Tunisia. This study then ultimately deals with both "Culture" as a signifying element in the identity of colonial elites and "culture" as the terrain for elaborating that identity.<sup>19</sup> The construction of French culture in events sponsored by the Bureau reflected the particular, historically-situated worldview of colonial officials and organizers in Tunisia.<sup>20</sup> Changes to their understanding of France's post-colonial goals inevitably affected the image of French civilization that they presented.

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<sup>18</sup> Edward Saïd, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), xiii.

<sup>19</sup> Drawing from Gramsci, Jean and John Comaroff define this second "culture" as "the space of signifying practice, the semantic ground on which human beings seek to construct and represent themselves and others." Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 21.

<sup>20</sup> In thinking about the dominant conceptions held by Protectorate officials it is essential to consider to what extent the worldview guiding the Regency's cultural policy represented a form of hegemony. Again borrowing from the Comaroffs' discussions, hegemony refers to "that order of signs and practices, relations and distinctions, images and epistemologies—drawn from a historically situated cultural field—that come

In the Tunisian Protectorate, the phrase “cultural activities” referred to events such as artistic expositions, academic conferences, and literary competitions organized by a variety of associations which received backing from the colonial administration in Tunisia. By examining in detail these cultural activities, sponsored primarily by the Bureau of Public Instruction in the decade before independence, I will argue that through such events the government of the resident general sought to propagate and promote a particular image of French culture among Tunisian elites with the intention of securing a dominant position for French art, language and literature in a post-colonial Tunisia. This image, which presented French culture as both unified and diverse, continuous and dynamic, universal and superior emerged principally as a response to the new political realities created by the growing strength of Tunisian nationalism. While an implicit cultural policy that involved a consciously political projection of French arts, language, and literature had existed since the foundation of the Tunisian Protectorate, the increasing sense that direct French political control in the colony was coming to an end changed the frame of reference and the goals of this policy. The period after 1946 until the end of the Protectorate in 1956 saw an intensification of cultural activities, now targeted explicitly at an elite Tunisian audience and carried out with the intention of shaping the post-colonial relationship between the two nations.<sup>21</sup> Many of these elites, a majority of whom had passed through the French educational system, participated in the nationalist

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to be taken-for-granted as the natural and received shape of the word and everything that inhabits it.” Based on this definition, the representations of French culture found in records of expositions, conferences, and prizes cannot be considered hegemonic in the Tunisian context. They were by no means accepted by the majority of the Tunisian population. Even thoroughly assimilated Tunisian elites as a group, while a few may have shared the prejudices of French officials regarding culture, did not adopt the entire “cultural field” of the colonizing minority. Ibid., 23.

<sup>21</sup> The purpose of this study is not, however, to determine how successful French authorities ultimately were at preserving the status of French culture in the former colony. The goal is rather to understand how the end of colonialism in Tunisia and by extension the end of colonialism in general brought to the forefront the question of the lasting cultural dominance of the soon-to-be former colonizer.

movement and would move to occupy leadership positions formerly held by the French after independence.<sup>22</sup> Official concern over French culture's role in an autonomous Tunisia reflected a shifting understanding of French identity and France's position as a rapidly disintegrating empire during the period following the Second World War. On one level, preserving the status of French language and arts in former colonies was part of a strategy to maintain cultural links to the new national bourgeoisie, creating a channel through which to exert political and economic influence.<sup>23</sup> More profoundly, however, assuring this privileged position for French civilization in areas where direct political control was being curtailed or abandoned altogether was a process directly related to Frenchmen's negotiation of their own cultural identity in relation the rest of the world during the post-war era. To support their belief in the universality of French culture, colonial officials hoped to illustrate that the French *génie* (the intellectual spirit and unifying values of the French people), once firmly planted, could survive in former

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<sup>22</sup>The Tunisian elites that were the focus of the Bureau's cultural policy, while not an entirely homogenous group, shared a number of collective traits. Most had received some form of Western education either in colonial schools or in the metropole. Some worked in the colonial bureaucracy, others in the liberal professions. Among elites, French-educated Tunisian lawyers such as Habib Bourguiba, Tahar Sfar, Bahri Guiga were instrumental in organizing the nationalist struggle. Colonial cultural policy also targeted Tunisian intellectual elites who taught in colonial schools and universities, working under the authority of the Bureau of Public Instruction.

<sup>23</sup>Also, while it is the aim of this study to examine the Bureau's cultural policy as a strategy with more or less well defined long-term goals, it would be far too simplistic an interpretation to regard the projection of French culture in late-Protectorate Tunisia as a systematically coordinated and unitary process. This would be to underestimate what Nicholas B. Dirks recognized as the intrinsically "diffuse, disorganized, and even contradictory" nature of colonial projects. Dirks reminds us that "that the power of colonialism as a system of rule was predicated at least in part on the ill-coordinated nature of power." While encouraging cultural events which would appeal to the Tunisian elite and reinforce their affinities for France was part of an explicit policy, these events communicated at times a complex and contradictory view of what constituted French culture. These contradictions emerged at least in part from the growing complexity of the political situation in the Protectorate where nationalist artists, writers, and journalists increasingly challenged the colonial administration's domination of the public discourse on culture. What is essential is that growing concern over the post-colonial future in the Regency produced changes in how French culture was represented in government sponsored activities, changes which reflected an understanding of French cultural identity as linked to the nation's changing international role. Nicholas B. Dirks, "Introduction: Colonialism and Culture," in *Colonialism and Culture*, ed. Nicholas B. Dirks (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 7.

colonies after independence. At the same time, the preservation of French culture's dominant status in Tunisia was a question of French national prestige. For colonial officials, continuing to claim the universality and international importance of French civilization depended in large part on the future of French influence in former colonies. Members of the colonial government and others involved in the Regency's cultural policy thus projected a particular image of their own cultural identity, formed by the colonial context and in reference to their hopes for the post-colonial future.

In addition, the discourse on the superiority of French civilization as reflected in the activities of the Bureau was developed in opposition to local culture. For example, exhibitions featuring artistic production that corresponded to the Western definition of fine arts were presented differently from expositions of Tunisian arts and crafts, the latter assigned a reduced, primarily economic role in the cultural life of the Regency. The colonial government celebrated contemporary Tunisian artists, writers, and performers when and only when their works embraced the values and language of the colonizer.<sup>24</sup> They largely ignored or criticized the significant number of young Tunisian artists becoming increasingly active in the post-war period who sought to go beyond Western models, often drawing inspiration from traditional North African styles and themes. It is then essential to consider how local artistic production served as an oppositional point of reference for defining French culture in the colonial context.

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<sup>24</sup> This practice recalls Herman Lebovics discussion of "wrapping" in the context of the 1931 Colonial Exhibition. According to Lebovics, "wrapping native cultures within the high culture of European France...set the aesthetic and political guidelines for the creation of an imperial culture, one neither purely metropolitan French nor devoid of nativeness." In the Tunisian context, wrapping the artistic production of local artists and writers meant relating their works to French models. This assured that the works of these Tunisians did not present a threat to the cultural hierarchies of the colonial situation. Herman Lebovics, *True France: The Wars over Cultural Identity, 1900-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 57.

By privileging particular artistic and literary styles in specific contexts, culture activities contributed to the construction of a multi-faceted image of French political power.<sup>25</sup> For example, exhibitions featuring French cubist paintings might suggest the dynamic and modern character of French culture. In a different context, a more classical, academic style of painting elicited references to French *grandeur* or the eternal, unified nature of the French *génie*. Representations of different styles created an adaptable discourse on French cultural superiority and justified the need for French influence in an independent Tunisia.<sup>26</sup> However, in discussing this discourse, it is also necessary to define concepts such as universality, superiority, dynamism, continuity, unity, and diversity as they related the image of French culture presented in the Regency. Borrowing from a long tradition of French thought linking the ideals of the Enlightenment to the colonial project, public events in Tunisia characterized French culture as *universal* in the sense that it was both theoretically accessible to all and based on objectively defined truths about humanity, beauty, experience, etc. At the same time, officials stressed the *particular* nature of French cultural production, touting its *superior* position in both the colonial hierarchy and in comparison to other European nation-

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<sup>25</sup> In representing a particular vision of French culture, Protectorate officials consciously or unconsciously favored certain artistic and literary styles. Taken together, cultural events reflected a strategy to encourage the development of the Tunisian elite's "taste" for these particular styles. This situation recalls Leora Auslander's study of furniture making in modern France in which she discusses the twin dynamics of style and taste in supporting political institutions. As part of her analysis, Auslander examines how "political regimes... attempted to use style and taste to represent and construct their power." Leora Auslander, *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 2.

<sup>26</sup> Also, this question of how particular representations of a French national culture shaped the final years of colonialism in Tunisia recalls Nicholas Dirks' observation that, "what we now recognize as culture was produced by the colonial encounter, the concept itself was in part invented because of it." In this study, it is then also essential to keep in mind how a history of previous colonial encounters shaped the cultural field that Frenchmen in Tunisia drew from to construct their own image of French culture in a colonial context. Dirks, 3.

states.<sup>27</sup> Portraying French culture as *dynamic* meant highlighting its adaptability to the changing conditions of the modern world as well as its emphasis on scientific and technological advancement. This dynamism did not preclude references to a *continuous* national cultural tradition which had its roots in the Middle Ages with the emergence of the French nation itself. The term *diverse* suggested that a variety of styles, schools, techniques, and themes characterized French cultural production, but these were nonetheless *unified* by a more abstract set of concepts and values (those belonging to the French *genie*) such as a devotion to progress or a notion formal beauty. In post-WWII Tunisia, these aspects combined to create a multi-faceted image of French power. This colonial expression of cultural identity thus served the political needs of the Protectorate administration while revealing officials' hopes regarding France's post-colonial stature.

This study will focus primarily on artistic exposition, conferences, and prizes rather than cinema, musical performances, museums or other activities, which because of their association with fine arts also fell under the authority of the Bureau. While these other types of events undoubtedly contained portrayals of French cultural identity, the Bureau itself did not explicitly acknowledge their value as cultural propaganda and with the exception of cinema does not appear to have concentrated on attracting Tunisian audiences. Protectorate officials did express concern with maintaining French films' share of the Tunisian market in light of competition not only from the growing Egyptian film industry but more importantly from American films.<sup>28</sup> This concern, however, was

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<sup>27</sup> As Gary Wilder has pointed out, "intersecting national and colonial politics were shaped by an underlying antimony between universality and particularity," in the French empire. The interplay between these two contradictory concepts is one of the defining features of French colonial discourse. Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude & Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 19.

<sup>28</sup> Marc Blancpain to Remond, Feb. 11, 1948, Sous-dossier 2, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

for the most part economically motivated. Musical performances organized in Tunis served mainly to entertain the European population, and officials typically did not consider concerts a form of cultural propaganda. There are few references either to Muslim attendance or to efforts at drawing a larger number of Tunisian elites to concerts in the Regency.

To understand how the promotion of French culture in the colony reflected larger concerns about France's post-war role as a diminished world power, we must also consider the relationship between the Regency's policy and attempts to propagate French language and culture internationally. In July 1950, the Réunion des Charges de Mission Culturelle et Directeurs d'Instuts outlined France's basic international aims with regard to culture. The officials attending came to the conclusion that "the War has provoked a general receding of French culture abroad" and that in many countries members of the ruling class with affinities for this culture had fallen out of power.<sup>29</sup> According to the attendees, the most viable strategy for combating this trend was to concentrate attention on new elites using the Alliance Française and centers for cultural diffusion as intermediaries.<sup>30</sup> The overarching principal governing policy in Mexico as well as Egypt and Turkey was to encourage the use of French as a *langue de culture*. Furthermore, concern over how elites in each nation perceived French language and culture led to an emphasis on "circulating material which communicates an image of France as vivid and as current as possible."<sup>31</sup> Another major development in France's international cultural

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<sup>29</sup> Report, *Compte Rendu de la Réunion des Charges de Mission Culturelle et Directeurs d'Instuts*, 1950, pg. 1, Dossier A, Article 650, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

<sup>30</sup> Report, *Compte Rendu de la Réunion des Charges de Mission Culturelle et Directeurs d'Instuts*, 1950, pg. 2, Dossier A, Article 650, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

<sup>31</sup> Undated report from the Ministère des affaires étrangères, *Compte Rendu de la Réunion des Charges de Mission Culturelle et Directeurs d'Instuts*, pg. 7, Dossier A, Article 650, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

policy was the emerging notion that organizations responsible for the promotion of French language and culture should address local issues in the countries where they operated. This meant that French institutes were expected to incorporate “local history, geography, and civilization” into activities such as conferences or exhibitions.<sup>32</sup> Even before the true beginnings of decolonization, the official conception of France’s status as a world power had begun to shift toward a vision based on establishing the nation’s influence abroad through “cultural linkages.”<sup>33</sup> When applied to former colonies, this reimagining of France’s international role represented an evolution of the *mission civilisatrice*.<sup>34</sup> The phrase “cultural linkages,” which seemed to suggest a kind of post-colonial partnership between France and her former colonies, implied in reality the continued dominance of French language and arts. The assertion that France had a transformative impact on colonized regions depended greatly on the continued attachment to French culture in these areas.

In the body literature on French imperialism, there are virtually no scholars who deal directly with the relationship between public cultural events and attempts by French colonial governments to maintain cultural dominance in the post-colonial world. However, there are a number of studies that examine the role of education in attempts to instill French cultural affinities among colonial subjects in the French Empire. Jonathan

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<sup>32</sup> Undated report from the Ministère des affaires étrangères, *Compte Rendu de la Réunion des Charges de Mission Culturelle et Directeurs d’Instuts*, pg. 10, Dossier A, Article 650, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

<sup>33</sup> The notion of “cultural linkages” was in part an outgrowth of the earlier French colonial policy of association, which was defined by the notion that “the determining factors in all colonial policy should be the geographic and ethnic characteristics and the state of social development of the particular region submitted to foreign control. Evolution of native groups along their own lines was key.” Raymond F. Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890-1914* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 106.

<sup>34</sup> For discussions of the *mission civilisatrice* see Mathew Burrows, “‘Mission Civilisatrice’: French Cultural Policy in the Middle East, 1860-1914,” *The Historical Journal* 26 (1986):109-135; Alice Conklin *A Mission to Civilize: the Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

Gosnell in his study of the attempted *francisation* of Algeria emphasized how educational policy both reflected the need to “generate a French cultural identity” and to create “an elite able to communicate...between European and indigenous spheres.”<sup>35</sup> Also focusing on Algeria, Fanny Colonna in her *Instituteurs Algériens* considered how education in the colonial context held out French culture as a model for the colonized while at the same time discouraging those who came too close and threatened divisions between Europeans and North African Muslims.<sup>36</sup> Looking at the goals of the *mission civilisatrice* in West Africa, Alice Conklin notes that a crux of this mission was “to teach non-French speakers to become French, through education.”<sup>37</sup> According to Conklin in this West African context, “the French conflated civilization with...becoming culturally French.”<sup>38</sup> Each of these scholars deals with the question of how French culture was presented to colonized subjects and the political implications of this presentation. This study addresses how both the goals and the nature of this presentation changed as colonialism came to an end, as well as the specificity of the Tunisian case.

The fact that an official policy of assimilation was never enacted in Tunisia as in Algeria coupled with the generally milder experience of colonialism under the Protectorate meant that the role of French culture in Tunisia was conceived of in different terms.<sup>39</sup> If the *francisation* process in Algeria was, as Gosnell asserts, incremental and incomplete, then it was even more so in Tunisia. Secondly, while Tunisian independence

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<sup>35</sup> Jonathan K. Gosnell, *The politics of Frenchness in Colonial Algeria 1930-1954* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2002), 67.

<sup>36</sup> Fanny Colonna, “Educating Conformity in French Colonial Algeria,” trans. Barbara Harshav, in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Fredrick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 346.

<sup>37</sup> Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*, 73.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Mounira Charrad, *States and Women's Rights: the Making of Postcolonial Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 115.

was a conceivable possibility as early as the late 1940's, the civilian government in Algeria flatly rejected the notion that an integral part of France might one day become an independent Muslim nation. Taking a far more moderate stance, Protectorate officials openly discussed and took measures to shape the post-colonial relationship between France and Tunisia. In comparison to the situation in Morocco, the primary differences in Tunisia were in the size and influence of the Muslim elite *de culture française*. Yahia H. Zoubir has remarked that in Morocco "the formation of new elites lagged a generation behind similar Tunisian developments."<sup>40</sup> However, in many ways the situation in the two protectorates was comparable, and in both cases, "traditional elites survived the French conquest and assimilated French culture without losing their standing in the society."<sup>41</sup>

### **The Bureau of Public Instruction and Fine Arts: Claiming Responsibility for the Representation of French Culture in the Colonial Context**

This section will focus on the role and importance of the Bureau of Public Instruction and Fine Arts in the colonial state. By briefly discussing the history of the Bureau, changes in its functions and the scope of its activities from the late nineteenth century onward, this section will show how responsibility for the official representation of French culture in Tunisia became an essential part of the Bureau's mandate.

Understanding the significance of the Bureau's activities in the post-war Protectorate also requires taking a detailed look at the makeup of the Bureau itself during this period. This entails examining the profiles of officials who had oversight of these activities as well as how they conceived of their contributions to the colonial project. Taking into account the

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<sup>40</sup>Yahia H. Zoubir, *North Africa in Transition: State, Society, and Economic Transformation in the 1990's* (Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida Press, 1999), 17.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

particular history and composition of the Bureau will help to situate the study of artistic expositions, conferences, and competitions in relation to the perceived role of public instruction and fine arts under colonialism.

The Tunisian Protectorate was established in 1881 with the signing of the Bardo Treaty by the Bey, Muhammad al-Sadiq following his capitulation to a French expeditionary force. Based on a new model extrapolated from the failures of colonial policies in Algeria, the French administration in Tunisia organized the first French Protectorate regime in which aspects of the Tunisian government were maintained and allowed to exercise a largely symbolic function, thus preserving the illusion of autonomy. Created shortly after the founding of the Protectorate, the Bureau of Public Instruction and Fine Arts was responsible for public education, state-run cultural events, and the oversight of independent cultural organizations. Symbolically, the Bureau was the embodiment of the *mission civilisatrice* in Tunisia. This notion of France's mission to civilize, which justified colonization on the basis of the presumed technological and "cultural" progress of the colonized, was a fundamental part of French colonial discourse from the conquest of Algiers in 1830 to the early 1960's. While it fails to do justice to the emphasis on technological progress in colonial discourse, Jenine Dallal's suggestion that, "French imperialism conceived of its chief offerings as language and culture" pinpoints the importance of promoting the French *génie* to the colonial project.<sup>42</sup> Since its creation, the primary responsibility of the Bureau was to organize a functioning educational system based on that of metropolitan France. Beginning with Louis Macheul's term as the Director of Public Instruction (1883-1908), the Bureau began to

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<sup>42</sup> Jenine Abboushi Dallal, "French Cultural Imperialism and the Aesthetics of Extinction," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 13, no. 2 (Fall 2000): 231.

incorporate traditional religious education for Muslims and Jews into the public education system.<sup>43</sup> Modern Qur'anic schools eventually emerged as the state-supervised alternative to the *kuttabs* (traditional Qur'anic schools), which nevertheless continued to operate as private institutions. The Franco-Arab school soon became the principal form of state-sponsored, primary education. As the name implies, these were bilingual institutions with French curricula that included courses on Islamic and North African History.

With the strengthening of a *colon* lobby, determined to keep power in the hands of Tunisia's European population, around the turn of the century, the government-sponsored educational system became gradually less accessible for Muslims, frequently pushing Tunisian students from non-elite families into technical schools.<sup>44</sup> Tunisia's rapid demographic expansion following WWI meant that the Bureau's size and importance would increase steadily during the interwar period. A larger budget and the building of new schools and professional centers reflected in particular the growing importance of technical education to the Protectorate's economic policy in the colony. Before WWII, the Bureau's primary responsibilities were in the domain of education with particular attention given to the role of instruction in economic development. The post-war Protectorate witnessed an expansion of the education system while the Bureau simultaneously intensified its oversight of cultural associations in the Regency. In 1950 alone, the Bureau opened twenty five new public institutions bringing the total number in the Protectorate to 343 Franco-Arab primary schools and 232 French primary schools (exact copies of metropolitan institutions attended overwhelmingly by Europeans and a

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<sup>43</sup> Perkins, 26.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

few Tunisian Jews).<sup>45</sup> However, the construction of new schools to service Tunisians rarely kept pace with the growth of the Arab population, and illiteracy remained pervasive especially in rural areas.<sup>46</sup> Despite the fact that it touched only a small percentage of Tunisia's population (around 33 percent of school-aged boys and only 13 percent of school-aged girls in 1956), the educational system enabled colonial authorities to claim credit for the technological and "cultural" advancement of Tunisians.<sup>47</sup>

Public education, while not the focus of this study, played a major role in the Bureau's efforts to maintain the dominant status of French culture among local notables. Secondary and post-secondary institutions were responsible for the formation of the Tunisian elite and ostensibly with instilling French values and an appreciation for France's civilizing project. Since the days of the Third Republic, politicians and government officials had considered the public school system in the metropole the crucible of French identity, where students from different regions were melded into citizens of the Republic "through the teaching of French language, culture, and history."<sup>48</sup> Transposed in the colonial context, public education took on a related but distinct role in the assimilation of Tunisian elites. Curricula in Tunisian institutions typically resembled those at metropolitan schools with occasional courses on North African history or Arabic as a foreign language included. Moreover, cultural events sponsored by the Bureau frequently took place at primary and secondary institutions for school-going audiences as

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<sup>45</sup> Report from the Direction de l'Instruction Publique, "1950 ce qui a été fait 1951 ce que l'on voudrait faire," 1951, p. 21-24, Sous-Dossier 1, Dossier A, Article 650, VA1, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Nantes, France.

<sup>46</sup> As late as 1953, literacy in rural areas was estimated at approximately 9%. "Rapport Spécial sur l'œuvre culturelle en Tunisie destiné à l'UNESCO (28-6-1953)," Direction de l'Instruction Publique, 1953, p. 6, Hors de Dossier, Article 650, VA1, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

<sup>47</sup> Perkins, 139.

<sup>48</sup> Gosnell, 5.

well as the general public. With its emphasis on transmitting language, values, concepts, and culture to students, the Protectorate's educational system was designed to spread the French *g nie* to Tunisia's upper classes. However, the goals of educational policy from 1946 to 1956 reflected above all a preoccupation with economic development. The majority of Tunisians who attended state-run institutions beyond the primary level encountered curricula that focused almost solely on technical education. Only a small elite minority benefited from a cultural education aimed at increasing their appreciation of and attachment to French civilization. Cultural activities that targeted Tunisian elites provided Protectorate officials with a more public platform for addressing nationalists' hostility to French culture. Also, while education played a multi-faceted role in the French administration's immediate and post-colonial plans in Tunisia, officials admitted supporting expositions, conferences, and competitions explicitly for their value as propaganda.

From a monetary standpoint, the post-WWII period saw a general increase both in the overall funding of the Bureau and of funding as a percentage of the Residency's overall budget. At the beginning of the Second World War in 1939, the Bureau of Public Instruction was responsible for approximately 97,599 students and had a yearly operating budget of 84,300,000 francs.<sup>49</sup> By 1944, the Bureau's budget had nearly doubled to 167,400,000 francs, although the student population grew by a mere eight thousand.<sup>50</sup> The next few years witnessed even larger increases, and by 1951 the Bureau's annual

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<sup>49</sup> Report from the Direction de l'Instruction Publique, "Evolution de budgets particuliers," Oct. 1951, Hors de Dossier, Article 650, VA1, Tunisie Deuxi me Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

budget had swelled to nearly three billion francs.<sup>51</sup> In addition, while in 1945, funding set apart for public education and fine arts constituted only 8.95% of the total budget, in 1951 the Bureau's share had grown to 13.78%.<sup>52</sup> These increases reflected the steadily mounting support for academic conferences, artistic exhibitions, and literary prizes which received subventions from the Regency's government.

During this period and particularly after 1948, Protectorate officials began to take a greater and more direct responsibility for the representation of French culture in the public space than had been the case in previous decades. Since the increasingly vocal anti-colonial press had transformed the question of Tunisia's cultural orientation into a subject of public debate, Protectorate officials realized the need to counter nationalists' criticism of French culture outside of the closed environment of the classroom. The Bureau's goal to "*defend* French language and culture" through "all possible means of expressing French thought" was a development of this period and suggested that officials now understood the importance of countering nationalist attacks.<sup>53</sup> While primary and secondary education remained the focus of the Bureau during the period following World War II in terms of the concentration of financial resources, increasing attention was given to promoting cultural events that took place outside of schools and would be targeted primarily at an upper-class Tunisian public of Western-educated professionals, intellectuals, and community leaders. This is not to say that, officials did not take Tunisia's European population into account when organizing expositions, conferences,

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid. Compare to the French Minister of National Education's Budget of 154 billion francs for the same year. See P. Mansell Jones, "The National Education in France II. Post-War Conditions," *Higher Education Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (May 1953): 276-283.

<sup>52</sup> Report from the Direction de L'Instruction Publique, "Renseignements Statistique (budget de 1947 à 1950-1951)," Oct. 1951, Dossier A, Article 650, VA1, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

<sup>53</sup> Emphasis added, Jean Mons to Robert Schuman, Jan. 31, 1950, Sous-dossier 5, Dossier A, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Nantes, France.

and competitions. Indeed, the understanding of French cultural identity that such events revealed belonged equally to the colonialist public, many of whom were involved in a colonial administration engaged in the public construction of this identity. However, the central political motivations behind government-sponsored “cultural activities” concerned Tunisian, Muslim elites. Moreover, official statements of policy made explicit this concentration on Tunisian notables. In 1950, the Bureau identified as one of its primary goals the “preparation of elites” to take up the role of the cultural leaders for the Tunisian masses.<sup>54</sup> The “culture” which they would represent according the Bureau must “be both harmonious and efficient and must appeal both to Arab and Muslim civilization and to French and Western conceptions.”<sup>55</sup> Through these elites, Tunisia could fulfill its “cultural mission” as an intermediary between the East and the West.<sup>56</sup> In reality, this goal involved Muslim elites *de culture française* acting as avatars of French influence in Tunisia. To cultivate their Western affinities, the Bureau encouraged expositions, conferences, and competitions that featured examples of French cultural production through financial contributions. The Alliance Française, L’Essor, Tunis’s many galleries, and numerous other artistic and literary organizations, all received subventions from the Bureau during this period and were able, as a result, to expand their activities. Unlike classroom-based education, events organized by these associations and supported by the Bureau took place in the public sphere, singling out Tunisian elites thought to possess affinities for French culture.

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<sup>54</sup> Report from the Direction de l’Instruction Publique, “Plan Theorique de mise en valeur de la Tunisie, Developpement de l’instruction Publique,” 1950, p. 14, Dossier A, Article 650, VA1, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Nantes, France.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

Another of the Bureau's new responsibilities during the post-war era was to address what were known as the "cultural problems" existing in Tunisia at the time. This phrase referred primarily to what one Protectorate official described in a 1950 letter as the desire of nationalist-leaning Tunisian elites "to develop a national culture...Arabization programs, [and] the spread of modern Qur'anic schools."<sup>57</sup> This tendency represented a break from earlier incarnations of Tunisian nationalism such as the Young Tunisians in the early twentieth century who emphasized the need to work within the French educational system to obtain the skills and expertise necessary to modernize the country.<sup>58</sup> In the group's newspaper *Le Tunisien*, articles identified the cultural dilemma facing Tunisians as a question of reconciling modern Western culture with traditional Arab-Islamic culture.<sup>59</sup> By the 1930's and particularly after WWII, however, nationalist parties such as the Neo-Destour had become more vocal in their identification with Arab-Islamic culture. The party's mouthpiece, *L'Action*, a French-language newspaper founded by a young Habib Bourguiba, criticized French efforts to stamp out traditional ways of life and portrayed the Neo-Destour as the defender of Tunisia's Arab-Islamic heritage.<sup>60</sup> These challenges to the colonial state's cultural policy from the nationalist movement help to explain the growing number of expositions and conferences as well as the new understanding of their political role.

The increased attention paid to cultural events in the post-war period also reflected a realization on the part of Protectorate officials who began to treat the possibility of Tunisian independence in the near future with greater seriousness. Writing

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<sup>57</sup> Lucien Paye to Jean Sarrailh, Nov. 17, 1950, Dossier A, Article 650, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Nantes, France.

<sup>58</sup> Charles A. Micaud, *Tunisia: The Politics of Modernization* (New York: Praeger, 1964), 30.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Perkins, 91.

to the Rector of the University of Paris in 1950, the Director of Public Instruction, recognized that the desire of Tunisian elites to create a “national culture” constituted the main threat to “the future of French culture in Tunisia.”<sup>61</sup> In the likely event that Tunisia would soon become independent, the Director believed that, “it would be necessary to firmly plant the seeds of the French language in this country, to accustom [the people] to French concepts.”<sup>62</sup> In an example of this policy, one official in Sfax encouraged French professors to give literary conferences at a local Muslim association known for its political radicalism. In this case, the *contrôleur* saw defending French culture as a way of counteracting the aims of Tunisian nationalists, which included the promotion of Arab-Islamic heritage.<sup>63</sup> This same official remarked that “cultivated” nationalists *de culture française* were inherently less threatening to the French colonial project.<sup>64</sup> According to this viewpoint, Tunisian nationalism, even if it resulted in independence, must not succeed in reducing the status of French culture within Tunisian society. In 1950, envisioning an independent Tunisia where Arab-Islamic culture would one day dominate, the Director remarked that “what matters, is the future of French culture in Tunisia...[and] the permanence of the links between France and Tunisia made possible by this culture.”<sup>65</sup> This reorientation of the Bureau’s energies, which came to focus on “the future of French culture in Tunisia,” does not imply that Protectorate officials were resigned to or welcomed Tunisian independence in the coming decade. Rather, political realities such as the rise of Tunisian nationalism and France’s clearly reduced importance

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<sup>61</sup> Lucien Paye to Jean Sarrailh, Nov. 17, 1950, Dossier A, Article 650, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Nantes, France.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Pierre Barras to Lucien Paye, March 6, 1953, Sfax, Sous Dossier 5, Dossier A, Article 652, VA1, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Nantes, France.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Lucien Paye to Jean Sarrailh, Nov. 17, 1950, Dossier A, Article 650, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Nantes, France.

in the post-war international order, forced such officials to seriously consider the possibility of independence and to develop strategies for ensuring some form of dominance in a post-colonial future. In other words, the architects of the Protectorate's cultural policy began to envision the type of post-colonial relationship that they desired as well as to take steps to assure the possibility of this vision. After 1954, even as the newly formed Tunisian administration took over nearly all domestic affairs, the French government tried to maintain some direct control over education and cultural activities through the Mission Culturelle et Universitaire de la France en Tunisie.<sup>66</sup> During the transitional period of internal autonomy from 1954 to 1956, the Mission Culturelle (jointly funded by the French and Tunisian governments) continued the Bureau's efforts, organizing the same types of cultural activities.<sup>67</sup>

The profiles of officials involved in shaping the Regency's cultural policy shed additional light on the relationship between cultural events and post-colonial ambitions during the final years of the Protectorate. Through their roles in assigning funding to events and bringing artists, actors, and academics from the metropole, these members of the colonial administration determined the face of French culture in Tunisia. Their choices in terms of both the content of exhibitions and conference and the ways in which these were presented to the Tunisian public betray an understanding of French cultural

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<sup>66</sup> As part of the 1955 agreement giving the Tunisian Government supposedly full control over internal affairs, the cultural convention (*convention culturelle*) established a dual education system in Tunisia with institutions run either by the Tunisian administration or the Mission Culturelle et Universitaire de la France en Tunisie. Though officially a branch of the French Embassy in Tunisia, the Mission's function largely mirrored that of the Bureau of Public Instruction in those institutions over which it had authority during the short transitional period. Ensuring the continued use of the French language at all levels of instruction was the Mission's primary goal. "Analyse de la convention culturelle," March 30, 1955, Dossier A, Article 650, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

identity and France's international role based on their experiences of working as colonial administrators.

The director of public instruction represented the Bureau's highest authority and answered directly to the resident general. G. Gaston, director from 1944 to 1948, had formerly worked as the principal of the Lycée Carnot, the elite high school in Tunis. He oversaw the reorganization of the Bureau's administrative structure in 1946 and was responsible for the 1947 decree offering subventions to the Regency's cultural associations.<sup>68</sup> As part of their application for financial support, organizations would have to agree to a degree of supervision by the Bureau and to abstain from political activities. Gaston thus contributed to the Bureau's enhanced role in the affairs of the Regency's cultural organizations.

For the majority of the post-war period, from 1949 to the end of the Protectorate, the directorship was held by Lucien Paye, a university academic and career politician who after his tenure in the colony would go on to become the Minister of National Education and the French ambassador to China. Before coming to Tunisia, Paye had previously served as the *chef de service* in the Bureau of Public Instruction in Morocco and in the Government General of Algeria.<sup>69</sup> During his directorship, Paye sought to more effectively coordinate cultural activities in the Regency, increasing the Bureau's oversight of theatrical, literary, and artistic organizations in an attempt to create coherent a cultural policy. At the same time, he focused on improving the quality of conferences,

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<sup>68</sup> G. Gaston, "Arrête relatif à la repartition des subventions aux Sociétés ou Associations Culturelles," *Bulletin Officiel de la Direction de l'Instruction Publique* 16 (1947): 24.

<sup>69</sup> "A la Direction de l'Instruction Publique M. Gaston va quitter la Tunisie M. Paye son successeur est arrivé," *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, Oct. 7, 1948.

concerts, and expositions, working to bring artists and academics with international reputations to the Protectorate.<sup>70</sup>

Early in his term, Paye also acknowledged the likelihood that Tunisian independence was fast approaching and the importance of assuring France's cultural role in the future nation. Following his departure from Tunisia, Paye published a number of academic studies such as "Physiognomy of Moroccan Teaching at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century" and "France's Hopes for the Instruction and Education of the African Citizen." The latter encouraged African former colonies to continue to use French curricula and identified the "cultural formation of the citizenry" as a primary developmental concern for these new nations.<sup>71</sup> Through the direct and indirect influence of the Bureau, Paye's understanding of France's long-term cultural goals in the colonies shaped the character of expositions, conferences, and prizes in the Regency during the Protectorate's final years.

Another important figure of the Bureau's last decade, Abed Mzali, the sub-director of public instruction under both Gaston and Paye, was a professor of Arabic literature who would play an important role in the negotiation of the post-independence cultural convention between France and Tunisia.<sup>72</sup> Mzali would also go on to serve in the newly independent nation's Ministry of Education. While his actual position in the Bureau involved only limited decision-making, Mzali had a hand in drafting a number of influential policy statements issued during this period.

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<sup>70</sup> Lucien Paye to Rouillon, Feb. 15, 1951, Dossier A, Article 650, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

<sup>71</sup> Lucien Paye, "France's Hopes for the Instruction and Education of the African Citizen," trans. Joel A. Hunt, *The Phi Delta Kappan* 41, no. 4 (Jan. 1960): 186-188.

<sup>72</sup> Mokhtar Ayachi, *Ecoles et société en Tunisie, 1930-1958* (Tunis: Centres de CERES, 2003), 100.

Each of these officials held significant sway in deciding which expositions and conferences would be allowed to take place in Tunisia and which would be financially encouraged. As long-term residents of the colonies, Paye and Gaston betrayed a decidedly colonialist viewpoint in their selection events and their discussions of the significance of cultural propaganda. A Tunisian national and an expert in Arabic literature, Mzali served an intermediary role in the Bureau. After independence he would go on to champion a Tunisian national culture, promoting the very ideology he had helped oppose during the Protectorate.

In 1952, the French Fine Arts Under-Secretary of State announced a plan to send an envoy, André David, to Tunisia and Morocco to study cultural activities, offer suggestions, and disperse funding for new cultural projects.<sup>73</sup> Officials in the Bureau of Public Instruction openly regretted the metropolitan government's treading on their prerogative. Their reactions to David's proposed voyage revealed how essential a cultural policy designed by the colonial administration was the larger aims of the Tunisian Protectorate. Defending the Bureau's territory, Resident General Jean de Hauteclocque reversed his early enthusiasm for the project, reportedly due to assertions that the Regency's cultural apparatus was already functioning at full capacity.<sup>74</sup> According to one of the Resident General's aids, the Alliance Française of Tunis held on average two academic conferences per week, and additional conferences were sponsored throughout the year by the Bureau through associations like "Jeunesses Musicales."<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> André Cornu to Jean de Hauteclocque, Dec. 2, 1952, Sous Dossier 5, Dossier A, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

<sup>74</sup> R. de Boissesson to René Bousquet, Oct. 30, 1952, Sous Dossier 5, Dossier A, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

<sup>75</sup> The "Jeunesses Musicales" was an association that primarily organized youth choirs and concerts in the Regency but that also occasionally held conferences on subjects relating to classical music. Ibid.

The size of the Tunisian public for such events apparently did not justify David's mission, which would have doubled the Bureau's functions. As the debate continued, however, it became clear that the Resident General sought to avoid above all the usurping of the Bureau of Public Instruction's authority by attempts of the metropolitan French government to intervene in the Regency cultural policy. Citing the Under-Secretary's hesitation to work through "existing local cultural institutions," (such as the Alliance Française of Tunis) de Hauteclocque otherwise welcomed increased financial support from the metropole, which would allow for a continued expansion of the Regency's cultural apparatus, as long as this apparatus remained under the Bureau's control.<sup>76</sup> The Resident General's intervention to protect the Bureau's monopoly of cultural events indicates the extent to which these activities were incorporated into local colonial policy. The representation of French culture was too essential a feature of the colonial government's plans for the Tunisian future to be left in the hands of an outside group, even if this group was backed by the French state. De Hauteclocque's decision to resist metropolitan interference sent a clear message to cultural associations inside and outside of the Protectorate. During colonialism's slow unraveling in Tunisia, the official right to represent France's cultural patrimony belonged solely to colonial authorities and specifically to the Bureau of Public Instruction in Tunisia.

### **Academic Conferences and the National Literary Tradition**

Having already witnessed the process of decolonization in Morocco and Tunisia, Frantz Fanon made the following observation in *The Wretched of the Earth*:

During the period of Liberation... the colonist bourgeoisie frantically seeks contact with the colonized 'elite.' It is with this elite that the famous dialogue on values is established.

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<sup>76</sup>Jean de Hauteclocque to Lucien Paye, Feb. 20, 1953, Sous Dossier 5, Dossier A, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

When the colonialist bourgeoisie realizes that it is impossible to maintain its domination over the colonies, it decides to wage a rearguard campaign in the fields of culture, values, and technology, etc.<sup>77</sup>

Fanon realized that under colonialism the loss of one form of dominance sparked attempts to salvage other forms. The fact that he places this practice in “the period of Liberation” reveals that he considers it part of the decolonization process. In Tunisia, conferences put on by a variety of government-sponsored cultural associations represented one of the central means that the Bureau used to wage its own “rearguard campaign.” During the post-WWII period as Tunisian nationalists demanded greater autonomy, members of the colonial administration expressed a great deal of concern over the value of such events as “cultural propaganda” and over their potential appeal to Muslim notables. In a letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Robert Schumann, the Resident General Louis Periller discussed the possibility of financially backing a recently proposed concert given by the blind pianist, Jacques Mary.<sup>78</sup> The Resident General justified declining direct financial support to such an event, referring to the fact that “our funds for culturally related propaganda are limited and must be reserved for enterprises of a greater interest than the coming of M. Mary such as for example the organization of conferences by professors...or the diffusion of French reviews and works in Muslim circles.”<sup>79</sup> The refusal of funding to this and similar events reflects the hesitation on the part of the colonial authorities to expend resources on activities with no apparent value as propaganda.

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<sup>77</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 9.

<sup>78</sup> Louis Periller to Robert Schumann, June 20, 1950, Article 653, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Nantes, France.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

This section will deal with how academic conferences and the associations that organized them presented a particular vision of French culture to Tunisian elites and how this vision reflected a new understanding of France's international role and cultural identity. The characterizations of French culture found in state-sponsored conferences are the result of selection by the colonial government and did not necessarily reflect the goals of metropolitan officials. Rather the image they created was born out of and took on its full meaning in the particular context of colonial Tunisia. Though the discourse on French culture in the final years of the Protectorate borrowed significantly from other sources in the metropole and from previous periods, it shifted noticeably as internal autonomy for Tunisia appeared on the horizon, becoming more defined and coherent as it was incorporated into a colonial strategy for maintaining cultural domination. In looking at how organizations and the officials backing them chose conferences presenting particular evaluations of French literary production, I will argue for the uniqueness of this colonial portrayal. For organizers and officials, French literature represented the most comprehensive expression of the nation's thoughts, values, and experiences. Eulogistic descriptions of France's literary production served to prop up the threatened image of the nation itself. By first discussing the role of the Alliance Française as the Regency's leading association involved in this process, we will come closer to understanding the connection between official policy, the portrayal of French culture, and the emergence post-colonial goals in Tunisia.

Perhaps the most prolific cultural organization in the Regency, the Alliance Française represented the linchpin of the Bureau's cultural policy. Beginning in 1946, the Bureau of Public Instruction focused increased attention and funding on the Alliance

Française as part of attempts to encourage “French propaganda and Franco-Tunisian rapprochement.”<sup>80</sup> In a single year, government aid accorded to the Alliance Française in Tunis rose from 18,000 francs to 300,000 francs, an increase paid for in part by the Algeria Lottery.<sup>81</sup> The connection between the colonial government and the AF was direct enough for the French administration to recognize the organization as a “public utility, whose goal is to spread the love for the French language and culture and at the same time to create links of mutual respect between French and Muslim intellectuals.”<sup>82</sup> Others within the organization understood the AF’s role in broader, more spiritual terms. As Maitre Eyquem, the president of the association, observed, “the Alliance Française in Tunisia...is no more or less than the alliance of the French soul with the Tunisian soul and of French civilization with Muslim civilization.”<sup>83</sup> Members of the AF purportedly came from “Tunis’s most fortunate *milieux*” and included large numbers of young teachers employed by the Bureau.<sup>84</sup> The AF also competed for an upper class Tunisian audience with other associations in the Regency such as the Alliance Littéraire de la Jeunesse Tunisienne made up of students at the Great Mosque in Tunis, the Association de Culture et d’Entraide Scolaire, and El Asria. Many of these Tunisian-led groups maintained close ties with political nationalism; their officers were commonly members of the Neo-Destour party. Competition between the AF and these Muslim-run cultural organizations thus took on a political dimension. Drawing elite Tunisians to government-

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<sup>80</sup> Lucien Paye to Jean Mons, Feb. 28, 1950, Dossier A, Article 650, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

<sup>81</sup> The Directeur des Finances en Tunisie to Charles Mast, Aug. 2, 1946, Sous Dossier 2, Dossier A, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

<sup>82</sup> M. Eyquem to Levy Lebhar, Octobre 24, 1946, Sous Dossier 2, Dossier A, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

<sup>83</sup> “Le But de l’Alliance Française: servir : discours de M. Eyquem à la réception du Résident Général,” *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, Oct. 23, 1953.

<sup>84</sup> Jean Mons to Robert Schumann, Feb. 28, 1950, Sous Dossier 2, Dossier A, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

sponsored events represented a means of counteracting their exposure to political nationalism. Other groups such as the Société Dante Alighieri, an organization founded to promote Italian language and culture and funded by the Italian Consulate, mounted conferences and expositions similar to those taking place at the AF.<sup>85</sup> Unlike the AF, such associations (who were not involved in propagating French art, language, or literature) did not necessarily receive the administration's financial backing and were often subjected to police pressures and surveillance by the colonial state.

Since the foundation of the Protectorate, Tunisia's relatively large Italian population represented either a potential ally, a threat, or a target for assimilation for French officials depending on the political situation at a given moment. Mark Choate has noted that "the Italians of Tunisia resisted the imposition of a 'French' identity...through cultural institutions such as schools and charities."<sup>86</sup> The Société Dante Alighieri was the most important among these with close ties to the Italian government and a program of conferences to rival that of the Alliance Française. When the headquarters of the Société fell into the hands of the colonial government in retaliation for its Fascist leanings during the war, members of the administration initially proposed turning the building over to the Alliance Française as part of a strategy to encourage the "development of French culture in the Regency."<sup>87</sup> Eventually given to the AF in the form of a subvention, this new building included a conference room with projection equipment for film showings, a

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<sup>85</sup>The Société Dante Alighieri was primarily founded to serve Tunisia's large Italian population, organizing language schools and cultural programs for the community.

<sup>86</sup> Mark Choate, "Identity Politics and Political Perception in the European Settlement of Tunisia: the French Colony versus the Italian Colony," *French Colonial History* 8, (2007): 106.

<sup>87</sup> The Directeur des Finances en Tunisie to Jean de Hauteclocque, Dec. 3, 1952, Sous Dossier 2, Dossier A, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

library and exposition spaces.<sup>88</sup> Sections of the center were decorated with floor mosaics, murals, and French and Tunisian flags.<sup>89</sup> These embellishments supposedly added “a certain indispensable architectural character to the representation of Alliance Française in Tunisia” by incorporating styles and motifs suggestive of a Tunisian influence.<sup>90</sup> By all accounts, the new AF building was meant to reflect the position of French culture in the colony, as not only particular and superior but also universal and therefore inclusive of local influences.<sup>91</sup> The restaurant at the Alliance Française of Tunis was a gathering place for European and Tunisian elites of the city alike. One incident at the restaurant involving a Tunisian delegate, M. Djaballah illustrated the types of tensions existing within the Regency’s associations involved in promoting French culture. Asked by one of the establishment’s waiters to present an invitation card, a demand not typically made of the restaurants European patrons, Djaballah reportedly retorted that “the Alliance Française was created to spread French thought. And yet, it seems to me that they refuse this thought precisely to those who are in need of it.”<sup>92</sup> Djaballah’s remark reflected the situation of many Tunisian elites involved in the Regency’s associations who were expected celebrate French culture but not as equal partners.

In Tunis the AF’s primary activity was the organization of conferences typically open to the public. While a substantial number of these addressed practical or explicitly

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<sup>88</sup> Letter, Jean Mons to Robert Schumann, Feb. 28, 1950, Sous Dossier 2, Dossier A, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

<sup>89</sup> Untitled report on the Alliance Française of Tunis, May 19, 1959, Sous Dossier 2, Dossier A, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

<sup>90</sup> Joss Ellul to Maître Eyquem, Jan. 13, 1948, Sous Dossier 2, Dossier A, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

<sup>91</sup> For a discussion of how the political dynamics of French imperialism were aesthetically inscribed in a blend of modern French and local architectural styles see Gwendolyn Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

<sup>92</sup> Note from the Cabinet Civil, “Délégué Tunisien à l’Alliance Française,” April 21, 1950, Sous Dossier 2, Dossier A, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

political issues such as medical advancements or the impending dangers of Stalinism, the majority of conferences were devoted to subjects related to French cultural and particularly literary production. For the year 1950, the association sponsored a series of lectures, panels, and symposia whose titles suggest a general focus on France's contributions to Western culture such as "The International Influence of French Music," "a French Writer in the U.S.," "Apollinaire," "Why Descartes Wrote the *Discourse on Method*," "Proust and Painting," and "The History of the Melodrama."<sup>93</sup> In a letter to Robert Schumann, the Resident General Jean Mons specifically mentioned that the topics for 1950 had been chosen with the intention of "illustrating French achievements," but that further attention should also be given to finding subjects that would appeal to Tunisians by incorporating aspects of North African, Middle Eastern, or Mediterranean history and culture. The conferences focused primarily on French literature and conveyed the notion of a unified French literary heritage of international importance. Yet the call to include more material of local interest in conferences cannot be dismissed as empty rhetoric, but rather reflected attempts both to attract a larger audience from the Muslim elite and to characterize French culture as universal in the sense of providing a system of values and an appropriate framework for discussing subjects related to North African. This tension between depicting the particular grandeur of French cultural production and demonstrating its universality (its capacity to serve as the vehicle of expression for the lived realities of non-French peoples) was a major characteristic of the discourse on literature in the final decade of the Protectorate. It stemmed from colonial

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<sup>93</sup> Letter, Jean Mons to Robert Schumann, Feb. 28, 1950, Sous Dossier 2, Dossier A, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

officials' desire to draw larger numbers of Muslim elites into the orbit of French culture as Tunisian transitioned to independence.

Emphasizing the particular contributions of French writers and poets to Western literary traditions was part of the discourse on French cultural superiority. Thus a French speaker at the AF of Tunis could characterize Baudelaire as “the Pope of poetry for all of the West,” and another mention the “universal influence” of Paul Valéry.<sup>94</sup> Considered together, a number of the conferences mounted during the Regency's last years presented an image of French culture as having a substantial international influence. In a 1946 conference on “England and French literature,” an English guest of the Alliance Française described the artistic and literary community inhabiting the Chelsea area of London as “utterly permeated by French influence.”<sup>95</sup> Similarly, another conference held that same year by a Flemish novelist Toussaint Van Boelaere focused on demonstrating “how great the influence of French culture and French literature has remained on the best writers of the Dutch language.”<sup>96</sup> The fact that, as one reviewer for *La Dépêche Tunisienne* pointed out, contemporary Flemish writers were virtually unknown in Tunis at the time, did not prevent the Alliance Française from inviting the speaker who sought to emphasize above all “how profoundly French literature had influenced Belgian literature in Dutch.”<sup>97</sup> Affirming French literature's international dominance added a broader, global dimension to the colonial discourse on French cultural superiority. These types of conferences also allowed officials to juxtapose international prestige with the “the

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<sup>94</sup> “A l'Alliance Française: Baudelaire par M. Armand Hoog,” *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, Oct. 14, 1949; “A l'Alliance Française: M. Toesca a Parlé de Paule Valéry,” *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, April 28, 1950.

<sup>95</sup> “Les Conférences,” *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, March 20, 1946.

<sup>96</sup> “Les Conférences,” *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, Dec. 3, 1946.

<sup>97</sup> *La Dépêche Tunisienne* was the daily newspaper with the widest circulation in the Protectorate. It consistently presented a right-wing viewpoint and had close ties to both members of the colonial government and the *colon* business lobby. “Les Conférences,” *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, Nov. 29, 1946.

progressive reduction of French influence” in Tunisia as a result of nationalist encroachment.<sup>98</sup> France’s reputation, tarnished by surrender during WWII, could (organizers hoped) be refurbished in the domain of culture. In this way, they imagined a post-colonial future in which France’s international status was assured through lasting cultural influence in former colonies.

Contemporary French authors who traveled to Tunisia occasionally lectured at one of the Regency’s venues. Conferences by up-and-coming French writers, typically associated with modernism or progressive ideals, reinforced a discourse on the dynamism of French civilization. In 1946, Luc Estang, described by *La Dépêche Tunisienne* as “one of the most qualified representatives of new French literature” for his poetry and work as the literary director of the Catholic right-wing newspaper *La Croix* came to speak at the Lycée Carnot of Tunis.<sup>99</sup> One reviewer described Estang’s discussion of poetry as “transmitting to the Tunisian public a little literary fresh air from Paris.”<sup>100</sup> Another leading journalist, Pierre Bourdan, championed France’s successful emergence from the war as a revitalized nation-state and the progress made in all areas of French society.<sup>101</sup> Images of a dynamic and adaptable France also emerged from literary conferences on the masters of French modernism. Max-Pol Fouchet’s conference on Guillaume Apollinaire, played up the great man’s status as the poet of modernity who addressed the “problems of Art in the modern world” in his verse.<sup>102</sup> Another event held in 1953 at the Institut de

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<sup>98</sup> Report, De Saint Paul, “Essai de Synthèse des diverses hostilités à l’action françaises, instaurée et poursuivie dans les territoires d’Outre-mer notamment en Tunisie”, May 1, 1950, Sous Dossier 5, Dossier A, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

<sup>99</sup> “Les Conférences: Bernanos ou le Risque Chrétien,” *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, Jan. 25, 1946.

<sup>100</sup> “Les Conférences: Qu’est-ce que la Poésie par M. Luc Estang,” *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, Feb. 1, 1946.

<sup>101</sup> J.R.M., “Les Conférences: La France de 1948 par Pierre Bourdan,” *Tunisie-France*, Feb. 13, 1948.

<sup>102</sup> “A l’Alliance Française: la Conférence de Max-Pol Fouchet,” *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, Dec. 16, 1949.

Belles Lettres Arabs centered on “Contemporary French Poetry.”<sup>103</sup> Highlighting the progressive, humanistic aspects of French modernism, the speaker, André Rousseaux, considered how the works of Paul Eluard, Saint John Perse, René Char, and Henri Michaux reflected a “mission...to establish a more intense communication between men.”<sup>104</sup> Grouping together the works of disparate poets, Rousseaux spoke of all contemporary French poetry as sharing this same “mission.” He asserted that their literary production “is not poetry in retreat. It is dedicated to the great renovation of the world, which is today a necessity...It [contemporary French poetry] announces this renaissance that it is working to create.”<sup>105</sup>

Conferences such as these constructed a non-threatening modernism in their portrayals of French literature. Speakers like Rousseaux and Fouchet linked the works of writers and poets to a notion of progress, ignoring the fundamental critiques and uncertainty that characterized much modernist literature.<sup>106</sup> These events also suggested to elite Muslim audiences that French culture provided a framework for dealing with issues relating to modernity. Officials implied that, unlike Tunisia’s Arab-Islamic heritage, French culture provided a reservoir of ideas for dealing with challenges such as the social impact of technological advancement and industrialization, the creation of a modern, secular state, and the formulation of a national identity. Attributing a unified “mission” or a desire to renovate to contemporary poets suggested that French literary

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<sup>103</sup> “Aujourd’hui à l’I.B.L.A. Conférence de André Rousseaux,” *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, Nov. 5, 1953.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> “En une Conférence de Haute Tenue: M. André Rousseaux a Évoqué la Mission de la Poésie Française Contemporaine,” *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, Nov. 6, 1953.

<sup>106</sup> For discussions of French modernism in art and literature see Marjorie A. Beale, *The Modernist Enterprise: French Elites and the Threat of Modernity, 1900-1940* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999); Robert Jensen, *Marketing Modernism in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Ástráður Eysteinnsson and Vivian Lisak, *Modernism, Volume 2* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2007); Harry Levin, “What was Modernism?,” *The Massachusetts Review* 1, no. 4 (Summer 1960): 609-630.

production was engaged in generating new ideas for confronting the problems of modern world. Colonial officials shared this view, affirming the need to accustom Tunisians to “French conceptions,” ostensibly to prepare them for the challenges of transitioning to modern statehood.<sup>107</sup> At the same time, conferences celebrating French modernism reflected colonial officials’ fear that an independent Tunisia would abandon modern, Western education and return to traditional models.<sup>108</sup> This line of reasoning echoed a common dichotomy in colonial discourse that Tunisian culture equaled traditionalism and French culture equaled modernism. Conferences that emphasized the progressive, dynamic character of French modernism reinforced this distinction. The implication was that, unlike Tunisia’s Arab-Islamic heritage, French culture provided Tunisians with a framework for grappling with the challenges of modernity as they transitioned to statehood.

In April of 1950, the Resident General, Jean Mons boasted of a particularly successful spring conference season at the Alliance Française of Tunis. In a letter to Robert Schumann, Mons claimed that “what is the most useful to note this time is the very visible character of well formulated French propaganda that these events have taken on and the audience which they have had amongst the Muslim population.”<sup>109</sup> In particular, professor Gaëtan Picon, a French writer and art critic on a conference tour of North Africa, gave three lectures on French literature to large audiences including many Muslim notables at the Alliance Française of Tunis. The second of these dealt with the

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<sup>107</sup> The Bureau of Public Instruction and Fine Arts, “Plan Theorique de mise en valeur de la Tunisie, Developpement de l’instruction Publique,” 1950, p. 14, Dossier A, Article 650, VA1, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

<sup>108</sup> Lucien Paye to Jean Sarrailh, Nov. 17, 1950, Dossier A, Article 650, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

<sup>109</sup> Jean Mons to Robert Schuman, April 19, 1950, Sous Dossier 5, Dossier A, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

issue of morality in contemporary French literature addressing the fascination with the immoral in the works of Proust and Gide, the glorification of heroism by Saint-Exupéry and Monterlant, and the importance of total acceptance among the existentialists.<sup>110</sup>

Picon portrayed a diverse group of French authors writing over the course of the past half century as a part of continuous process of development, a unified movement taking place in “stages.”<sup>111</sup> This notion that all literature in French constituted a constantly evolving whole was an essential part of the image of French culture presented to elite Muslim audiences. Once again, this trait suggested the essential unity of the French *génie*, as well as its adaptability and constant forward evolution. In addition, the notion of an uninterrupted, indeed uninteruptable, national literary tradition would have been appealing for officials who had witnessed endless disruptions in the exercise of French political power since the beginning of WWII. They thus portrayed French culture as possessing the type of stability and continuity that the colonial state in post-war Tunisia lacked.

Branches of the AF were also active outside of Tunis, particularly in Sfax, Sousse, and Bizerte where leading figures in the association often held key posts in the Bureau of Public Instruction as well. As part of a festival celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Honoré de Balzac’s death, the Alliance Française put on a number of conferences in Tunis, Bizerte, Sfax, and Sousse that focused on the work of the French literary giant.<sup>112</sup> These conferences given by Gaëtan Picon and M. Duvernet centered on Balzac’s role as a

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<sup>110</sup> “Le Problème Moral dans la Littérature Contemporaine,” *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, March 31, 1950.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> Edouard de la Chauvinière to Robert Schuman, March 21, 1950, Sous Dossier 5, Dossier A, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

“visionary” within the French literary tradition and drew large crowds to the AF.<sup>113</sup> These academics approached the question of Balzac’s legacy by emphasizing his contributions as the father of French realism in shaping the national literary tradition. The festival also included iconographic material, portraits of the writer, and collections of his works.<sup>114</sup> Another lecture by Maurice Garçon, a French lawyer, novelist, and historian elected to the Academie Française in 1946, on “the history of melodrama” concentrated on the new genre’s role as an expression of the Revolutionary period and a bridge between classicism and the romantic tragedy.<sup>115</sup> Events in the Regency, tended to highlight the works of individual authors or particular movements as belonging to and contributing to the progression of a continuous French literary tradition. By subordinating the achievements of specific writers to this larger tradition, speakers emphasized literature as the collective expression of the French *génie*. This phenomenon reflected a construction of French cultural identity on the part of officials who sought to place the French national idea at the root of all literary production.

One fundamental assumption of Protectorate officials during the post-war era was that affinity for French cultural production equaled attachment to the French nation. Accordingly this notion guided their attempts to represent French authors, poets, and playwrights to elite Tunisian audiences. Accounts of conferences held in the Regency revealed a narrative of French literary heritage that was linked to the development and progression of the French nation itself. In this narrative, claims about the superiority of the national literary tradition echoed justifications for the dominant political position of

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<sup>113</sup> “A l’Alliance Française: M. Gaetan Picon Parle de Balzac,” *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, March 24, 1950.

<sup>114</sup> Edouard de la Chauvinière to Robert Schuman, March 21, 1950, Sous Dossier 5, Dossier A, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

<sup>115</sup> “La Conférence à l’Alliance Française,” *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, Feb. 28, 1950.

the French in the colonial relationship. The notion of an existing canon, a diverse collection of writers and poets who somehow came to represent French literary production and the nation itself took on a unique importance in the Tunisian context. Numerous studies of the formation of literary canons during periods of nation-building have revealed that defining canonicity plays a role in the construction of national identity.<sup>116</sup> In the French context, Margret Cohen and Carolyn Dever discuss how the definition of a French literary canon in the late eighteenth century contributed to the “Revolutionary-Napoleonic invention of modern cultural nationalism.”<sup>117</sup> Canonical literacy history was intended to aid in the “cultural education of the citizen” and to embody the values of the nation itself, or more particularly of the French *génie*.<sup>118</sup> In the Tunisian context, lectures on works belonging to the canon sought to inspire allegiance from Muslim notables. Many of these elites had passed through the Regency’s public educational system, which was structured in large part around these texts. In the final years of colonialism, the notion of a literary canon resonated with the attempts of organizers and officials to present distinctive works from a diverse group of authors under the unifying banner of the nation. Recalling Saïd’s discussion of culture, the literary canon represented Frenchmen in Tunisia’s “reservoir of the best that has been known and thought.”<sup>119</sup> In these conferences, speakers subordinated the importance of individual writers to their participation in the larger, national literary tradition. For example, a visiting literary editor Pierre Paraf held a conference entitled “Lumières de

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<sup>116</sup> See Michael Gluzman, *The Politics of Canonicity: Lines of Resistance in Modern Hebrew Poetry* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003); Mohamed Salah Omri, *Nationalism, Islam and World Literature: Sites of Confluence in the Writings of Mahumd al-Mas’adi* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Margaret Cohen and Carolyn Dever, *The Literary Channel: the Inter-National Invention of the Novel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

<sup>117</sup> Cohen and Dever, 24.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> Saïd, xiii.

France,” where he considered the lives and works of Victor Hugo, Émile Zola, Henri Barbusse and Anatole France.<sup>120</sup> Paraf’s scattered observations on these “great men” took on coherent meaning only by drawing on their status as members of the canon. Conference speakers also discussed specific literary figures from the French canon as representatives of the nation. André Rousseaux provided an example in a presentation on Jean Giraudoux entitled “Poète de la France.” The academic concluded his exposition on the playwright by observing that “France’s presence is constant in the work of Giraudoux...the French soul comes together with that of the writer, the soul of Giraudoux.”<sup>121</sup> This notion of the nation inhabiting French literary production explains in part the eagerness of Protectorate officials to promote the taste of the Muslim elite for French poetry and prose. Preserving the status French canonical literature meant defending the French national idea and the influence of the French *genie* in the soon-to-be autonomous Tunisia.

The AF frequently invited members of the Academie Française to speak in Tunis. These conferences took on an even more explicitly political character because of the status of presenters whose roles as definers and defenders of the national canon gave symbolic weight to their portrayals of French literature. In 1946, one member of the Academy, Jerome Tharaud spoke in Tunis about the writer and poet Charles Péguy, a literary figure who in his words “glorifies once again our country.”<sup>122</sup> Tharaud’s assertion that, “France is right to have confidence in herself; she has proved in the past that the good opinion she holds of her role is not an illusion of her pride,” reflected the

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<sup>120</sup> “Les Conférences: ‘Lumières de France’ par Pierre Paraf,” *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, Nov. 1, 1946.

<sup>121</sup> “A l’Alliance Française: Jean Giraudoux poète de la France par M. André Rousseaux,” *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, Nov. 13, 1935.

<sup>122</sup> “A Tunis Depuis Hier M. Jérôme Tharaud: Le Flaneur qui se Fait Météore,” *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, Oct. 29, 1946.

self-doubt and uncertainty that preoccupied Frenchmen in the immediate aftermath of WWII.<sup>123</sup> In the post-war Protectorate, Tharaud's affirmation that French literary production assured national greatness took on a different meaning than in the metropole. His statement suggested not only the importance of national pride in a country shaken by wartime defeats, but also France's fitness to rule her empire in spite of growing international and internal criticism of imperialism. Without fail, the arrival of an *immortel* on Tunisian soil generated a great deal of political fan-fare, attracting the attention of the highest ranking members of the colonial government. For example, the audience of a 1948 presentation given by the academician Emile Henriot on Flaubert, "the uncontested master of French prose," included M. de la Chauvinière the plenipotentiary Minister, the wife of then Resident General Jean Mons, and other leading personalities of the Regency.<sup>124</sup> During this period, public celebrations of French cultural identity embodied by members of the Academie Française remained linked to the idea of the nation and legitimized France's role in the colony at a time when her future position and influence in Tunisia were in question.

Perhaps ironically, France's recent war experience was another popular topic for conference speakers who incorporated martial themes into discussions of literature. References to the war invoked the unifying values of patriotism and shared struggle in a context where Protectorate officials sought to inspire loyalty among colonial subjects. In a conference entitled "Writers in Combat," Pierre Paraf, himself an author and member of the Resistance, explained how active patriotism and the experience of war helped shape

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> "A l'Alliance Française M. Emile Henriot parle de Gustave Flaubert," *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, Dec. 14, 1948.

French literary production.<sup>125</sup> Another French author and resistance fighter, Pierre Nord, otherwise known as Colonel Brouillard (Colonel Fog), held a conference at the AF entitled “The Adventure Novel to the Realities of War.” Praising war adventure literature written in the aftermath of the Second World War, Nord claimed that such novels “do not destroy households” and “always show the true face of France, a country of efficient intelligence.”<sup>126</sup> These conferences dramatized the war experience linking it to France’s literary heritage. By establishing the connection between verbal art and patriotic struggle, these events also sought to capitalize on the shared memory of French and Tunisian soldiers, brandishing themes of self-sacrifice and loyalty to the mother country. At the same time, these conferences provided opportunities for speakers to suggest France’s willingness and capacity to use military force in front of Muslim audiences, thereby implicitly discouraging armed nationalist struggle.

Conferences in the Protectorate served as a platform for the thoughts and reflections of academics *de culture française* living or traveling in Tunisia. While not necessarily conscious collaborators in the Bureau’s cultural policy, many of them nevertheless contributed to a colonial discourse that championed French universalism and disparaged Muslim backwardness. Conferences that dealt with “universal themes” implicitly identified French civilization as the model. Another artistic and literary association known as L’Eclair, a socialist-leaning organization with its own auditorium, also received financial support from the colonial government. Based in Tunis, L’Eclair held a number of conferences and theatrical performances during the early 1950s. One of

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<sup>125</sup> “Les Conférences: M. Pierre Paraf a parlé des ‘Ecrivains au combat,’” *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, Oct. 29, 1946.

<sup>126</sup> “A l’Alliance Française Brillante Conférence du Colonel Brouillard,” *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, Oct. 8, 1948.

these entitled “Diderot and the *Encyclopédie*” is representative of the types of academic events held in the Protectorate during this period. According to an issue of *Tunisie-France* the conference speaker “highlighted above all the grandeur of the work, the grandiloquence of its *prospectus*, the perseverance and enthusiasm of its promoters, intellectuals, and artists.”<sup>127</sup> This conference followed to a large degree the standard interpretation of the *Encyclopédie*’s importance as a foundational text for compiling the values of the Enlightenment. According to the speaker, the collection of these tomes constituted both a “moment in our [French] intellectual history” and a “crisis of human thought.”<sup>128</sup> Highlighting the *Encyclopédie*’s status as a particularly French project served to bridge the gap between the universal and particular representation of French culture by associating the values of universal humanism with the specific historical, intellectual, and political context of 18<sup>th</sup> century France. Similarly, in a 1949 lecture on Racinian verse, Raymond Picard, a French specialist in classical theater, emphasized “the grandeur of this ‘work of civilization’ that Racine’s plays represent.”<sup>129</sup> Singling out French literary lights as the models for civilization endowed their works with a universal character. Protectorate officials themselves frequently referred to the universal nature of French culture. In the final days of the Protectorate, officials made plans to erect “centers for cultural diffusion” in a number of Tunisia’s major cities. These institutions would be responsible for distributing French publications in Tunisia and organizing conferences, providing an example of “the universal and liberal vocation of our nation [France].”<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> J.R.M., “Conférence à l’Essor,” *Tunisie-France*, Jan. 23, 1951.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> J.R.M., “Les Conférences: La Poésie de Racine est-elle pure ou impure?,” *Tunisie-France*, April 8, 1949.

<sup>130</sup> Note from the Ambassade Extraordinaire Mission Exceptionnelle de la République Française en Tunisie, April 24, 1957, Sous Dossier 5, Dossier A, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

As colonialism came to an end in Tunisia, officials' need to emphasize the universal character of French civilization intensified. In their view, Muslim notables' continued attachment to France depended on persuading them that the French model was both attainable and truly representative of the humanistic values of the Enlightenment. These conferences suggested that French culture was accessible to Tunisian elites, capable of encompassing their experiences and connecting them to the notion of a greater humanity. At the same time, these events portrayed French literary production as the most representative of "universality." According to this image, French culture offered Tunisian elites, on the verge of an essential decision about the cultural orientation of their nation, a link to civilization and universal humanism.

### **Presenting Local Culture in Conferences: Muslim Thinkers and the Distant Past**

In an attempt to organize conferences which would appeal to burgeoning Tunisian elites while simultaneously transmitting French values, cultural organizations sought out topics related to North Africa or the Muslim world. One popular approach was to sponsor conferences on Islamic scholars from earlier periods, such as a symposium dedicated to the work of Ibn Sina, known in the West as Avicenna, held at the Lycée Carnot in February 1950.<sup>131</sup> Henri Merlen, a teacher at the Lycée Carnot in Tunis, emphasized the "spirit of research" that characterized Avicenna's work and which "ought to inspire all of the Islamic world."<sup>132</sup> Another of the conference's speakers, Paul Sebag, reportedly discussed in detail the influence of Avicenna's work on Western civilization."<sup>133</sup> This event, attended primarily by Tunisian and European university

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<sup>131</sup> Note from the Cabinet Civil, "Conférence à l'Université Nouvelle," Feb. 18, 1950, Dossier A, Article 650, VA1, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Nantes, France.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

students, was an example of how conferences connected topics relating to North African or Arab Islamic culture to the overall vision and values of the French *génie*. Choosing to use his Western name throughout the conference, speakers evaluated Ibn Sina on the basis of his contribution to Western thought, and thus relegated his work to a subordinate status in relation to the West. This tendency to deemphasize the uniquely Arab-Islamic character of important figures shaped events intended to celebrate Muslim contributions. In an AF-sponsored conference on “Islamic Humanism,” speakers suggested that, “Muslim humanism, which does not differ from other humanisms in the sense that it aims to perfect men’s possibilities, grew out of a harmonious dosage of the heritage of Hellenic civilization and the Qur’an.”<sup>134</sup> By relating trends in Islamic thought to European humanism and situating them within a heritage that the West claimed as its own, speakers cast Arab-Islamic culture in a subordinate role.

This approach to discussing Muslim thinkers in an academic setting was so pervasive that it even influenced events held by Muslim cultural organizations. Another conference sponsored by the Tunisian student association, the Jeunesse Scolaire, on Ibn Khaldoun, a figure of particular importance to nationalists due to his Tunisian origins, was reportedly attended by over six hundred people among them numerous students from the Great Mosque and Sadiki College, two crucibles of the Tunis-based Muslim elite.<sup>135</sup> While the conference had a clearly nationalist flavor, in terms of content it betrayed the same need to discuss Ibn Khaldoun’s achievements in relation to Western civilization. One contributor, Mohammed Tahar Guiga drew parallels between Ibn Khaldoun and a Greek historian of the same period, highlighting the materialist aspects of his work.

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<sup>134</sup> J.M.R., “Les Conférences: L’Humanisme Islamique,” *Tunisie-France*, May 28, 1949.

<sup>135</sup> Note from the Cabinet Civil, “Conférence sur Ibn Khaldoun,” April 16, 1951, Dossier A, Article 650, VA1, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Nantes, France.

Later, citing Ibn Khaldoun's interest in the economic life of the country, he referred to him as "a good communist."<sup>136</sup> This treatment of singular figures associated with Tunisia's Arab-Islamic heritage served the interests of Protectorate officials in a number of ways. On one level, making Muslim thinkers from the classical period the subject of academic conferences was part of a strategy to appeal to the tastes of Muslim elites. At the same time, these conferences, even those sponsored by Tunisian-led organizations, portrayed these figures through a Western lens, identifying their importance primarily in relation to Western thought and values. Finally, by focusing on works from Islam's Golden Age, these conferences relegated Arab-Islamic cultural achievements to the distant past. A lecture given by Robert Montagne in 1948 on Bedouin poetry functioned in a similar way. Montagne mentioned the fact that these nomadic tribes in North Africa, generally considered "barbarians," were indeed "ignorant of the arts" with the exception of oral poetry.<sup>137</sup> He emphasized above all the social function of nomadic epic poetry speaking more in the mode of an anthropologist than a literary critic. Still, a large number of Tunisian Muslims apparently attended and applauded Montagne's presentation.<sup>138</sup>

Speaking at the 1951 inauguration of the Alliance Française's new center, the organization's president, Georges Duhamel made a point of demonstrating that "our intellectuals, our Arabists are highly thought of by the Islamic literati. They passionately love the object of their studies; it is the French who have defended with the greatest

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> "A l'Alliance Française: Une Conférence du Professeur Montagne sur la Poésie Bédouine," *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, Nov. 14, 1948.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

warmth and the most intransigence, the cult of Arabic literature.”<sup>139</sup> Duhamel, a celebrated French writer and poet devoted to the Alliance’s cause of spreading French civilization, went on to propose that French serve as “the second language of Islam” because of its wide influence among Islamic peoples and the access it permitted to the West as a *langue de culture*.<sup>140</sup> With the colonial state under increasing pressure from nationalists, officials openly discussed internal autonomy and the possibility of Tunisian independence in the near future.<sup>141</sup> In this context, Duhamel’s statements, while on one level an appeal to Tunisian Muslims, allude to the type of post-colonial relationship envisioned by the architects of the Regency’s cultural policy.

Considered together, government-sponsored conferences in the Protectorate contributed to a discourse on French culture’s universality, dynamism, unity and superiority. The tendency to emphasize each of these aspects reflected the post-colonial concerns of public officials. Their attempts to inspire cultural attachment among Tunisian Muslim elites led them to sponsor events intended to appeal to “Oriental tastes.” At the same time, these events presented a reformulation and a reaffirmation of French cultural identity during a period when French national prestige and the tenets of universalism appeared threatened.

### **Literary Competitions and “Oriental” Themes: Le Prix de Carthage**

As with academic conferences, literary competitions in the Regency provided a sphere for Protectorate officials to engage in the negotiation of French cultural identity. By recognizing specific works written by the European and Tunisian inhabitants of the

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<sup>139</sup> “La Maison de l’Alliance Française Inaugurée hier à Tunis Doit Être l’Instrument de Rapprochement des Civilisation Française et Musulmane,” *Tunisie-France*, March 31, 1948.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> Lucien Paye to Jean Sarrailh, Nov. 17, 1950, Dossier A, Article 650, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Nantes, France.

Regency, officials provided a definition of what constituted literary merit. In the final decade of the Protectorate, however, the choices of colonial prize commissions began to reflect attempts at a more conciliatory approach to bringing Tunisians into the orbit of French culture. By “wrapping” French literary or academic works in a local veneer, the architects of the Regency’s cultural policy hoped to attract the attention and approval of Muslim elites.<sup>142</sup> Prize commissions began to single out works that dealt with North African themes and subjects and to award talented writers of Tunisian origin. One particular literary prize, the Prix de Carthage presents an interesting case due to the jury’s decision during this period to recognize two Tunisian writers with contradictory understandings of their own French cultural identity. The Director of Public Instruction headed the jury of the Prix de Carthage and was also responsible for selecting the other members. In 1950 for example, the prize commission was composed of Lucien Paye, Maitre Eyquem, the president of the Alliance Française, and other individuals with close ties to the Bureau.<sup>143</sup>

A 1947 Beylical decree identified the Prix de Carthage as “an annual prize whose amount is determined in the budget, to award a literary work of fiction (collection of short stories, novel, poetry, theater, etc...) or of nonfiction (history, archeology, geography, ethnographic research, folklore, etc...) concerning subjects of North African and particularly of Tunisian interest.”<sup>144</sup> The decree explicitly stated that the competition was open to all nationalities but that all works submitted must be in French.<sup>145</sup> While the

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<sup>142</sup> For discussions of cultural “wrapping” see Lebovics, *True France: The Wars over Cultural Identity*.

<sup>143</sup> “Procès-Verbal de la reunion de la Commission charge de décerner le Prix de Carthage 1950,” Sous Dossier 6, Dossier A, Article 652 bis, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Nantes, France.

<sup>144</sup> Décret Beylical, Feb. 13, 1947, Sous Dossier 6, Dossier A, Article 652 bis, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Nantes, France.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

official objective of the prize commission was always to identify and recognize literary and academic talent, the particular propaganda value of the Prix de Carthage depended on a selected work's ability to address topics of relevant to Tunisia through a lens based on French values and culture. Submissions which did not contain some reflection on the nature of the Tunisian, North African, or so-called Oriental experience went largely ignored. For example, one year's jury criticized *Sous le ciel de Tunis*, by Olivier Toreau for presenting no particularly North African qualities aside from the fact that the story happened to take place in Tunis.<sup>146</sup> The novel was described as lacking "a local and oriental character," which would have otherwise justified Toreau's selection.<sup>147</sup> The prize commission sought out more than a superficial engagement with North African themes in the literary and academic works they considered. That said, assuring that French culture served as the dominant framework for an author's work remained essential. The prize encouraged intellectual or literary works that mediated between French and local culture, while the perspective, values and expression of this production remained thoroughly French. As a result, the prize commission headed by the Director of Public Instruction reinforced the image of French civilization as universal and inclusive.

In 1951 and 1952, Abd al-Majid Tlatli and Albert Memmi respectively became the first two Tunisian nationals to be awarded the prize. While Tlatli, the first Muslim recipient of the Prix de Carthage, wrote florid verse celebrating Tunisia's Carthaginian past and claimed to believe firmly in the vitality of the civilizing mission, Memmi openly contradicted much of the Bureau's discourse on French culture in his autobiographical novel *La Statue de Sel*. The prize commission singled out these two Tunisian literary

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<sup>146</sup> Notes of the Jury of the Prix de Carthage, 1945, Article 2081, Tunisie Premier Versement, Archives du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Nantes, France.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

figures at a time when opposition to colonial rule had led to the outbreak of violence across the country. Their selection compels us to consider the implications of the Bureau's supporting artists and writers of Tunisian origin whose primary interests lay within the Regency.

The following is an excerpt from a poem by Abd al-Majid Tlatli, entitled "Tunis, Rhythm of Africa" from the volume *On the Ashes of Carthage*:

Architecture de génie  
Scintillant sourire des masses et des races;  
Synagogues, églises, mosquées!  
Vivons, ô Ménaâm,<sup>148</sup> ces beaux songes musqués;  
Intenses vibrations de la fraternité!<sup>149</sup>

[Inspired architecture  
Sparkling smile of masses and races;  
Synagogues, Churches, Mosques!  
Oh Ménaâm, let us live these beautiful scented dreams;  
Intense vibrations of brotherhood!]

Shortly after hearing of his selection by the Prix de Carthage's jury for this collection of poems, Tlatli responded to the prize commission, confirming in a letter that, "this official recognition will only enhance my love for the French language, which I have served with all my faith and all my breath. By welcoming me among *your poets*, by thus affirming the primacy of the Spirit (the essential virtue of all humanism) you have proved *the vitality of your mission within these walls*."<sup>150</sup> He also referred briefly to how the commission's decision flew in the face of "political divergences and contingencies that paralyze a renewed Humanism in the poetry and literature of the world."<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> This reference to "Ménaâm" is possibly the transliteration of an Arabic term, although its precise definition is unclear.

<sup>149</sup> Abd El Majid Tlatli, "Tunis rythme d'Afrique," in *Sur les Cendres de Carthage: poèmes* (Saint-Étienne: Éditions de la Pensée française, 1952).

<sup>150</sup> Emphasis added. Abd El Majid Tlatli to Lucien Paye, Feb. 8, 1952, Sous-Dossier 6, Dossier A, Article 652 (Bis), Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

Two aspects of Tlatli's letter in particular make clear why members of French colonial government who sat on the Prix de Carthage's jury singled him out as an ideal candidate. First of all, his aspirations to enter the ranks of metropolitan French poets and his "love" for the French language illustrate an acceptance of the cultural hierarchies that Protectorate officials were interested in preserving in the face of challenges from Tunisian nationalists. While in the excerpt above, he speaks of a "fraternity" between the inhabitants of the colony, in his letter Tlatli implicitly acknowledges French culture with its basis in universalism and humanism as the model. He thus supported the view of a colonial state in Tunisia which regarded French culture as categorically superior to Arab-Islamic.

Secondly, his affirmation of France's colonial project came at time when the vitality of the civilizing mission had been called into question in the context of burgeoning nationalist movements throughout the empire and the nation's rapidly diminishing standing in the post-war international order. Tlatli disparaged "political divergences," choosing to cast his lot with a European-led humanism. Describing Tlatli's work one member of the jury made the following observation about the poet's significance and the general role of the Prix de Carthage:

Tlatli is in my opinion a poet of great talent. He has a true poetic gift. Some of his verses are reminiscent of Valéry. A Tunisian of French culture, who has chosen to express himself in our language, Tlatli deserves to be encouraged. The Prix de Carthage seems to me particularly destined to compensate a writer of this kind.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Notes of the Jury of the Prix de Carthage, 1950, Sous-Dossier 7, Dossier A, Article 652 (bis), Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives du Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

Politically innocuous and grounded in a French literary tradition, Tlatli's work exemplified the cultural relationship envisioned by Protectorate officials. He acknowledged French culture as his model and adopted French language and values in his poetry.

Albert Memmi's selection, however, demands a more nuanced interpretation. A Tunisian Jew from modest origins, Memmi had attended the Lycée Carnot in Tunis where he would go on to teach in 1953. His first novel, the semi-autobiographical *La Statue de Sel (The Pillar of Salt)*, published in 1953, bore witness to the contradictory images of French culture delivered by his teachers and their incompatibility with the realities of the colonial situation. Five years after his recognition by the Prize Commission, Memmi would publish *The Colonizer and the Colonized* a theoretical critique of the colonial situation. Beyond his indictment of inequality and abuse in the colonial system, the author also depicted the impossibilities of assimilation and the ultimately empty promises of French universalism through the life of his protagonist in *La Statue de Sel*, Alexandre Benillouche. As a scholarship student at an elite high school in Tunis, Alexandre recalls the euphoria of cultural identification experienced after a recent success in one of his literature courses:

In my heart, I cried with joy. I, the son of a Jew of Italian origin and a Berber, I spontaneously discovered what was the most Racincian in Racine. At night, in my bed, I often cried with joy, reading Rousseau, for example, when I thought I recognized in his passion, his humble origins, his refusal of his background, my own ambitions and my own future.<sup>153</sup>

Alexandre's eventual disillusionment with the promises of French civilization provides an intense portrait of the isolation and malaise that colonized intellectuals faced as a result of the cultural encounter under colonialism. For example, after a pogrom

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<sup>153</sup> Albert Memmi, *La Statue de Sel* (Paris:Gallimard, 1966), 128.

encouraged by colonial authorities claims the life of a Jewish friend, Alexandre concludes that “European philosophers construct the most rigorous and virtuous moral systems and politicians, educated by these same professors, foment assassinations as a means of governing.”<sup>154</sup> This critique of the fundamental contradiction between the images of a universal culture presented to colonial subjects and the brutal realities of French rule reflect a challenge to the discourse on French culture promoted by Protectorate officials.

Understanding why then the commission awarded Memmi a prestigious literary prize during a period of particular tension between Tunisian nationalists and the colonial state requires a degree of speculation. In an unsigned note marked “confidential,” one member of the Bureau provided an account of a public debate that Memmi held at the Lycée Carnot on the subject of his newly released novel.<sup>155</sup> The event was sponsored by the Université Nouvelle and attended by more than eight hundred individuals among them “numerous members of the Tunisian Communist Party and ‘progressive’ intellectuals.”<sup>156</sup> Introducing Memmi’s work to the audience, a philosophy professor, M. Chatelet, praised the *Statue de Sel* for its unveiling of many of the country’s prevalent economic and social problems. Another philosophy professor and member of the Communist Party, Paul Sebag then spoke, criticizing Memmi’s novel for its lack of a coherent ideological message to “orient the youth and give them hope in the future.”<sup>157</sup> Indeed, the fact that Memmi avoided aligning himself with a specific political project

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 290.

<sup>155</sup> Note from the Cabinet Civil, “Conférence à l’Université Nouvelle,” May 21, 1953, Sous Dossier 6, Dossier A, Article 652 bis, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Nantes, France.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

(Zionism, Communism, or Tunisian Nationalism) rendered his critique of colonial society in Tunisia more palatable for the officials in charge of awarding the Prix de Carthage. Lucien Paye, convinced of the novel's quality, even claimed to have encouraged Memmi to submit *La Statue de Sel* to the prize commission.<sup>158</sup> Ultimately, Memmi's selection by the jury seemed a politically-minded move by colonial authorities anxious to award Tunisians. While certainly counter to prevailing notions about French culture's ideal role in Tunisia, Memmi's work did not propose that French influence be cast off in favor of a developing Tunisian national culture. If anything, the writer and philosopher regarded the development of Arab-Islamic nationalism with a degree of skepticism.<sup>159</sup> It is reasonable to surmise that Memmi's selection was possible because the author situated himself in a kind of intermediary position, as French-educated colonial subject. The negative portrayal of colonialism in *La Statue de Sel*, while poignant, hardly resembled the more biting critiques of Tunisian nationalists. Moreover, officials do not appear to have considered the novel's content a threat to the Bureau's cultural policy. Considering the jury's desire to encourage talented Tunisians who chose to write in French, the decision to award Memmi was doubtless intended to further the long-term goals of this policy.

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<sup>158</sup> As the Director of Public Instruction, Paye served as a member of the jury responsible for awarding the Prix de Carthage. "Prix de Carthage: Membres du jury," Sous Dossier 6, Dossier A, Article 652 bis, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Nantes, France; Lucien Paye to de Boissezon, Jan. 12, 1953, Sous Dossier 6, Dossier A, Article 652 bis, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Nantes, France.

<sup>159</sup> One profound observation that Memmi made in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* was that the nationalist movement continued to define itself in relation to the colonial situation. To truly break colonialism meant moving away from reactionary responses against the colonial system. Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 139.

## Representing French Artistic Production: Colonial Fine Arts, Post-War Orientalism, and the Role “Indigenous Arts”

Herman Lebovics in his study of the tensions and debates relating to French identity in early 1900’s, has pointed out that:

French political practice interpreted the logic of the nation-state as requiring that political boundaries approximate cultural ones, or more precisely, that all of the nation that counted, that is participated in public life, share a national culture....Conversely, cultural concerns such as language, art styles, and ways of living, indeed, even what was credited as common sense, had political weight and meaning.<sup>160</sup>

In the colonial context this same practice of requiring that political boundaries resemble cultural ones, can be applied to the approach of the French administration to the cultural education of Tunisian notables. Muslim elites, who had limited influence under the Protectorate, gradually gained more and more political sway as colonialism neared its end in Tunisia. Their growing power proved less threatening to colonial officials if these elites appeared to share the same cultural orbit. In this scenario with local, French-educated elites in control, the politico-cultural boundaries of the Protectorate would remain intact. Muslim notables’ shared cultural affinities with the French then appeared as the basis of a new political relationship. This quotation from Lebovics also highlights how the representation of a unified and unique national culture became essential to French national identity in the early 1900’s. For Protectorate officials in late 1940’s and early 1950’s, representing the quality, unity, and uniqueness of their nation’s artistic production was directly tied to the image of French civilization as culturally and politically dynamic. Through this image, the nation’s status as a declining empire and a

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<sup>160</sup> Herman Lebovics, “Creating the Authentic France: Struggles over French Identity in the First Half of the Twentieth Century” in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John Gillis (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1944), 240.

rejected post-colonial power could be refashioned by focusing on the continuation of French civilization in soon-to-be former colonies. As one official remarked:

I believe independently in the administrative and political education of the Tunisian population, it is interesting from the point of view of the public powers to encourage all French cultural and artistic events, thus proving to the autochthonous population that French grandeur and vitality in the domain of civilization is more than idle talk.<sup>161</sup>

Artistic expositions allowed the architects of the Regency's cultural policy to project this image into areas of the public space most frequented by partially assimilated Tunisian elites. In addition, by favoring specific artists and certain styles for expositions held in Tunisia, organizers engaged in a debate on the contours of French identity. As in previous periods, official discourse equated French art with fine arts and Tunisian art with crafts. This characterization in the colonial context drew from Western cultural hierarchies that associated fine arts with civilization and labeled crafts as useful, primarily economic, and in some cases connected to pre-modern or primitive societies.<sup>162</sup> The need among Protectorate officials to highlight this dichotomy between practical arts governed by necessity and fine arts as a display of status grew as Tunisian artists challenge the French monopoly on fine arts, producing thoroughly modern works that drew heavily from local and traditional themes. As Kenneth Perkins has observed, "even amid the political and social turmoil of the post-war era, the arts continued to reinforce the nationalist cause through their exaltation of Tunisian identity."<sup>163</sup> Spurred on by this competition, the Bureau of Public Instruction and Fine Arts and the organizations under

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<sup>161</sup> Delpard to Louis Periller, Oct. 31, 1950, Article 653, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Nantes, France.

<sup>162</sup> Pierre Bordieu has discussed this distinction of the "dominant art" (in this case French fine arts) as "based on the opposition between the brutish necessity which forces itself on the vulgar, and luxury as the manifestation of distance from necessity." Pierre Bordieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), 254.

<sup>163</sup> Perkins, 114.

its aegis used expositions to wage their own war of the arts for the of taste and appreciation of Muslim elites.

The Bureau showed particular concern with the quality of artistic expositions presented to a Tunisian public described as “exigent” in terms of its expectations of metropolitan artists.<sup>164</sup> Expositions were expected “to favor the propagation of French art in Tunisia,” unlike one art show put on by the Cercle Littéraire et Artistique de Nice in 1950 whose works according to Protectorate officials “did not surpass nor even equal the works of local painters.”<sup>165</sup> Another association, the Union Féminine Artistique d’Afrique du Nord founded in 1948 to provide financial support to artists living and working in Tunisia, arranged occasional exhibitions in the capital typically considered of inferior quality by Protectorate officials.<sup>166</sup> To improve the quality of French art exhibited in the Protectorate, Lucien Paye proposed increasing financial aid for the organization of expositions that “favored the cause of French artistic influence.”<sup>167</sup> More damaging to the Bureau’s overall strategy than the lackluster character of the works featured at certain events was the fact that such representations failed to support the supposed superiority of metropolitan France’s artistic production. An exposition which failed to impress Tunisian elites could only hamper the political goals of the Regency’s cultural policy by contradicting this policy’s subtext, that French civilization was unified, continuous, superior and dynamic.

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<sup>164</sup> Lucien Paye to Jean Mons, Feb. 28, 1950, Dossier A, Article 650, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Nantes, France.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> *Status de l’Union Féminine Artistique d’Afrique du Nord (Section de Tunisie)*, Article 2696, Tunisie Supplément au Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

<sup>167</sup> Lucien Paye to Jean Mons, Feb. 28, 1950, Dossier A, Article 650, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

The construction of French cultural identity in the Regency involved emphasizing the particular status of French art within Western civilization. Expositions sponsored by the Bureau and frequently held at regional centers of the Alliance Française sought to convey the international reputation of French artistic production to Tunisian elites as part of the discourse on French cultural superiority. As Lucien Paye remarked in a letter to the editor of *Arts de Spectacles*, “French art...enjoys a prestige that is without a doubt the best guarantee of Franco-Tunisian collaboration.”<sup>168</sup> An essential aspect of the Bureau’s policy regarding expositions was that the representation of Western fine arts in general should assure a privileged place for French contributions. One critic described a 1949 exposition of “Sketches of French Masters of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century” as providing “proof of the influence of French art abroad.”<sup>169</sup> Similarly, a UNESCO exposition of modern art held in Tunis in the summer of 1950, which notably featured reproductions of several Manet paintings, caused one official to remark that “the interest of this exposition in the realm of French cultural propaganda in Tunisia is that in the choice of paintings by painters of all nationalities, the portion of French painters is—as is just, but still worth noting—very clearly predominant.”<sup>170</sup> Discussions of French art’s international supremacy in the Tunisian context borrowed from attempts to define and distinguish the French artistic tradition during the interwar period. Romy Golan in her study French art and politics during the 1920’s and 1930’s considered how a particular breed of interwar French nationalism produced a need to establish what constituted national artistic production.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Lucien Paye to the editor of *Arts de Spectacle*, March 30, 1954, Sous-dossier 5, Dossier A, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Nantes, France.

<sup>169</sup> “Exposition de Dessins des Maitres Française du XVIII Siecle,” *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, Dec. 29, 1949.

<sup>170</sup> De la Chauvinière to Marcel-Edmond Naegelen, June 2, 1950, Dossier A, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Nantes, France.

<sup>171</sup> Romy Golan, *Modernity and Nostalgia: Art and Politics in France between the Wars* (New York: Yale University Press, 1995), 137.

With ever larger numbers of Eastern European and Jewish artists joining the Paris artistic community, “the question of the status of French culture *vis-à-vis* foreign elements living in its fold” led to “measures...taken by curators in order to separate things French from things foreign.”<sup>172</sup> An understanding of French art’s particularity compelled Waldemar George, a French art critic and devoted nationalist, to declare in 1931, “French art is neither cosmopolitan, nor universal, nor international. Whatever its roots and ramifications, it releases a perfume that betrays its place of birth.”<sup>173</sup> In the colonial context, however, assertions of French art’s uniqueness coexisted with discourse on the universality and inclusiveness of the metropole’s artistic production. Once again, this fundamental tension reflected the particular political needs of Protectorate officials as Tunisia moved toward internal autonomy. They sought to prop up the image of the French nation by asserting the superiority of her culture while simultaneously convincing Muslim elites that this culture remained accessible to all.

Regardless of their various styles and influences, artists who chose to exhibit in the Regency saw their works placed in relation to a continuous French artistic tradition. In a review of the 1946 exposition of the works of Charles Guerin, for example, *La Dépêche Tunisienne*’s art critic S. Choley described the painter as “one of these masters who honors French Art, one of those who connect [*sic*] so closely with the beautiful traditions of the great impressionists.”<sup>174</sup> Clement Serveau, a post-cubist painter and graduate of Paris’s École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, encountered a similar success in Tunis’s galleries by situating himself within the French academic tradition. Praising the artist’s work, the same reviewer remarked that, ‘the painting of Clement

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 137-139.

<sup>173</sup> Waldemar George, “Défense et illustration de l’art français,” *Formes*, no. 20 (December 1931): 162.

<sup>174</sup> S. Choley, “Chronique Artistique,” *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, Jan. 10, 1946.

Serveau is balanced and new...it is quite French.”<sup>175</sup> He also described the works of Leo Nardus as “connected...to the most beautiful traditions of French art.”<sup>176</sup> The notion that these artists represented a national artistic tradition linked their works to the image of French culture in colonial discourse. By reducing artistic production to its place in a unified national tradition, this particular critic transformed celebrations of artistic talent into affirmations of French cultural superiority.

The Bureau considered the exhibition of French tapestries which took place in the winter of 1950 as a particularly successful event, primarily due to its apparent popularity among Muslim notables.<sup>177</sup> This exhibit, which was held at the Alliance Française of Tunis, included a range of works from medieval tapestries to modern productions by France’s most celebrated weavers.<sup>178</sup> In a letter to Robert Schumann, the Resident General Jean Mons who personally inaugurated the exposition attested to the positive effect of the exposition on “the Muslim notability whose artistic education prepared them to appreciate the art of the tapestry, even the most modern.”<sup>179</sup> This “artistic education” (*formation artistique*) that Mons refers to was a product of both the Protectorate’s education system, which encouraged affinities for French art of all periods, and similar types of events, which took place more and more frequently in the Regency’s public space. The presence of the Resident General and other leading officials at the inauguration indicated the highly political character of this particular exhibition. Also, by including both modern and ancient works, the exposition of French tapestries presented

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<sup>175</sup> S. Choley, “Chronique Artistique,” *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, June 7, 1946.

<sup>176</sup> S. Choley, “Chronique Artistique,” *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, March 6, 1946.

<sup>177</sup> Jean Mons to Robert Schuman, Avril 19, 1950, Sous Dossier 5, Dossier A, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

an image of France's national artistic production as continuous and unified. In the exhibition space provided at the Alliance Française of Tunis, the tapestries were arranged chronologically with the most ancient grouped together in the large hall on the ground floor. As visitors climbed the stairway to the second floor of the AF center, the works on display gradually became more modern, representing "the masterpieces of our national manufacturers."<sup>180</sup> This exhibition presented an art form, which although typically considered a craft, took on the role of representing French artistic production in this context. Among the works featured were seven creations of Jean Lurçat, an internationally renowned French weaver whose tapestries had been exhibited alongside paintings by Matisse, Georges Braque, and Picasso, thus assuring the exposition's "fine arts" character.<sup>181</sup> Lurçat's modernist works claimed to represent the pinnacle of French aesthetic achievement in a display that traced the development of a continuous artistic production across a long and glorious national history. The Resident General confirmed that this type of exposition enabled "France...to present in this country [Tunisia] an interesting aspect of her art, ancient or modern," and reiterated that "everything must be done to strengthen each day the cultural links between the metropole and the Regency."<sup>182</sup> Lucien Paye also described the exposition as "well conceived propaganda of French art in Tunisia."<sup>183</sup> In addition, Claude Choley, writing for the right-wing *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, highlighted what these French artists "had accomplished for

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<sup>180</sup> "Un Événement Artistique: M. Jean Mons a Inauguré hier l'Exposition de la Tapisserie Française," *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, Feb. 19, 1950.

<sup>181</sup> Undated report from the Direction de l'Instruction Publique et de Beaux Arts, "Exposition Circulante de Tapisseries Françaises," Article 653, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Nantes, France.

<sup>182</sup> Jean Mons to M. Salles, Dec. 20, 1950, Article 653, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Nantes, France.

<sup>183</sup> Lucien Paye to M. Salles, Dec. 20, 1950, Article 653, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Nantes, France.

France's legitimate grandeur."<sup>184</sup> These judgments were based on the event's power to transmit to Muslim elite visitors the vision of a continuous, unique, and unified French artistic tradition. Encouraging Tunisian tastes for French art during a period when the dominant position of this production in Tunisian society appeared under siege constituted a thoroughly political activity.

The Bureau's eagerness to present modern and even experimental works of art to the Tunisian public can be understood in terms of a need to characterize French culture as dynamic, that is to say adaptable and capable of responding to the challenges of modernity. As Gwendolyn Wright has noted, early twentieth-century artists invoked the term "modernism" to "[proclaim] their affinity with the process of modernization, which they saw as an inevitable and progressive force; architects and other artists appropriated images of standardization, speed, and simple, unadorned volumes from machine technology," while at the same time, "they condemned both historical styles and commercially oriented industrial design as sentimental compromise, pandering to an undeveloped bourgeois taste."<sup>185</sup> Protectorate officials sought to isolate the positive/progressive connotations of modernism while avoiding modernist works that contained overt cultural critiques. The image of modernism that expositions promoted in the Regency reflected above all a notion of technological progress and confidence in Western civilization that members of the Bureau were keen on communicating to Tunisian elites. Also, in exposing elements of the avant-garde, Protectorate officials never failed to confirm the particularly French characteristics of the artists on display. The Bureau of Public Instruction greeted with considerable enthusiasm the possibility of

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<sup>184</sup> Claude F. Choley, "Chronique Artistique: l'Exposition Circulante de Tapisseries Anciennes et Modernes," *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, March 23, 1950.

<sup>185</sup> Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism*, 10.

an exposition organized by Evrard de Rouvre, an art dealer who proposed to exhibit reproductions of French modernism's masterpieces.<sup>186</sup> De Rouvre's exposition presented colonial officials with "the chance to show...a complete collection of modern French painting in Tunis."<sup>187</sup> The types of modern or experimental works that received the Bureau's support necessarily presented a positive view of modernity, a version of the avant-garde that colonialists in the Protectorate associated with progress and dynamism rather than decadence and critiques of the West.

The works of Emmanuel Bocchieri, whose style *La Dépêche Tunisienne* described as quite modern but "enthusiastically optimistic," stood out at a 1948 exposition organized by the Alliance Française.<sup>188</sup> Claude Choley praised "the painter's evolution towards a modernism that is not at all extreme," suggesting the nonthreatening character of Bocchieri's art. For example, one of Bocchieri's better known works, *Les calèches à Tunis*, combines a modernist disregard for realism with a classic orientalism. The painting offers a depiction of Tunis's urban landscape clearly influenced by cubism with the structures in the background represented by a number of disjointed geometric figures. In addition, the brightly painted shops and sand-colored buildings alert the spectator that the image is that of an "oriental" city, albeit one heavily influenced by the European presence. At a similar exposition the following year, the same critic singled out the work of Médam as representing "a wise modernism."<sup>189</sup> At the showing of ninth Salon of Parisian Painters, critics celebrated the works of one contemporary artist as

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<sup>186</sup> Rouillon to M. de la Tour du Pin, 22 Nov. 1950, Article 653, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Nantes, France.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Claude Choley, "Chronique Artistique: Peintures d'Aujourd'hui à l'Alliance Française," *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, Dec. 2, 1948.

<sup>189</sup> Claude Choley, "Chronique Artistique: Peintures d'Aujourd'hui à l'Alliance Française," *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, Nov. 12, 1949.

“clear paintings, imprinted with the most agreeable optimism.”<sup>190</sup> The Alliance Française’s interest in displaying works by contemporary French artists reflects in part the need to portray French artistic traditions as dynamic, as capable of responding “optimistically” to the challenges of modernity. In the presence of Tunisian elite audiences, these events assumed a significance that they would have lacked in the metropole. In the colonial context, officials engaged in the construction of a strict dichotomy between French and Tunisian culture, suggesting that this divide constituted the opposition of modern and traditional ways of life. The deteriorating position of the colonial government led officials to use the status of French art to prop up the image of the French nation in Tunisia. In government-sponsored exhibitions, these modern works representing the promise of technological, economic, and cultural progress became tied to the image of French colonial power. Through a non-threatening and optimistic portrayal of modernism, these expositions implied that French culture offered the most suitable framework for Tunisia as the former colony transitioned to modern statehood.

Artistic expositions that dealt with France’s wartime experience were especially popular in the decade between 1946 and 1956, particularly when they emphasized Tunisia’s contributions to the war effort. Heroic, wartime portrayals provided a dramatic vision of Frenchmen engaged in armed struggle and aided by willing colonial soldiers. These depictions attempted to diminish the damage done to France’s image as a military power by surrender to the Germans. At the same time, representing the sacrifice of colonial subjects visually reinforced the notion of a blood-sealed bond between France and her Empire. One exposition of the work of a French painter, Jean-Paul Brusset, contained a section entitled “Images de la France en Guerre,” which featured scenes of

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<sup>190</sup> Claude Choley, “Chronique Artistique: Le XI Salon des Peintres de Paris,” Feb. 9, 1950.

France's initial resistance in the face of the German invasion in 1940. In an exposition brochure, Brusset's vision of wartime France is described as "leaning toward courage and distress at the same time, toward what is human, in single a word which never separates the authenticity and the original patriotism of all that is word contains in terms of grandeur and sincerity."<sup>191</sup> Such portrayals sought to recover a sense of patriotism and national grandeur in the aftermath of the France's WWII defeat. One French critic described Brusset's work as "an authentic hope for French painting," confirming the perceived nationalistic themes of his art.<sup>192</sup> This exposition addressed the major goals of the Residency's cultural policy in several ways. First, Brusset's status as an internationally celebrated painter situated in a French artistic tradition lent legitimacy to the national idea and reinforced notions of French cultural superiority. At the same time, his portrayal of France at war, at least according to the exposition's organizers, salvaged some of the nation's grandeur presenting French defiance and suffering in the campaign against the Germans.

Another painter, Roger Jouanneau-Irriera, who had accompanied French troops on campaign in Tunisia, Corsica and Italy, offered approximately six hundred of his sketches and watercolors for exhibition in the Protectorate.<sup>193</sup> According to Jouanneau-Irriera this collection represented for "Tunisia, a sort of history told through images, of its participation in the war of liberation" as well as "excellent French propaganda."<sup>194</sup> His collection focused not only on images of the war in Tunisia, but also featured images of

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<sup>191</sup>Brochure from the Exposition of Jean Paul Brusset in Tunis January 7-30 1944, Article 2604, Tunisie Supplément au Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

<sup>192</sup> Brochure from the Exposition of Jean Paul Brusset in Tunis January 7-30 1944, Article 2604, Tunisie Supplément au Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

<sup>193</sup>General Koenig to Louis Periller, Dec. 29, 1950, Article 653, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

<sup>194</sup> Roger Jouanneau-Irriera to Louis Periller, Fed. 23, 1951, Article 653, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

Tunisian soldiers fighting for France in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Algerian Infantry Division (DIA) while on campaign in Europe.<sup>195</sup> While concerns over the price of Jouanneau-Irriera's collection led to disagreements between protectorate officials and the artist, Lucien Paye acknowledged the quality of the works and the potential interest that they represented.<sup>196</sup> Artistic portrayals of the war, dramatized the experience of many French and Tunisian soldiers, helping to reinforce the notion that the two nations were bound by the blood of common struggle. These events addressed post-war dilemmas of French national identity in public spaces through artistic visions of patriotic struggle and Franco-Tunisian unity. For elite audiences, they provided powerful images of national pride while serving as reminders of the French military might.

The Bureau of Public Instruction's efforts to organize expositions of French art were frequently met with less than enthusiastic responses from metropolitan artists and museum directors. In 1952, Marcel Aubert, the Director of French Museums, rebuffed Lucien Paye's efforts to bring an exhibit of "One Hundred Drawings and Watercolors of Rodin" to the Regency.<sup>197</sup> Fears over recent outbreaks of violence in Tunisia influenced the decisions of museum directors such as Jean Cassou of the Musée National d'Art Moderne who refused to deliver eight oil paintings promised for the Salon Tunisien after reports of recent violence in the capital.<sup>198</sup> The fact that organizing artistic expositions remained one of the Bureau's priorities in spite of the rapid unraveling of the colonial situation indicates their centrality to the aims of the colonial government in Tunisia.

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<sup>195</sup> Roger Jouanneau-Irriera to de la Chauvinière, Dec. 14, 1950, Article 653, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

<sup>196</sup> Lucien Paye to Louis Periller, March 1, 1951, Article 653, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

<sup>197</sup> Robert Schumann to Jean de Hauteclocque, Aug. 14, 1952, Article 653, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

<sup>198</sup> Lucien Paye to Jean Cassou, March 5, 1952, Article 653, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

During this final period, officials focused on protecting French interests and influence in the quite likely event of Tunisian independence. Violence and the fear of metropolitan curators threatened the role of the arts in preserving this influence among Muslim notables.

In an attempt to attract an elite Tunisian audience, the colonial administration organized expositions featuring European painters whose works dealt with subjects relating to North Africa, Islam, or local life. The regional director of indigenous arts in Sfax singled out one showing organized in 1952 of the paintings of Augusta Lama for the artist's "personal vision of a robust Morocco" and of "the landscapes and architectures of Morocco and Algeria" as well as for the exposition's previous success among similar audiences in Morocco and Algeria.<sup>199</sup> At the same time according to critics, Lama's art embodied a particularly French aesthetic, conveying a lyricism reminiscent of "a beautiful poem of Paul Valéry."<sup>200</sup> As a long term member of Tunis's European artistic community, Mme. Lama exemplified a certain Orientalist trend among local painters. These artists depicted Tunisian realities through a Western lens, producing exotic visions of local life or neutral interpretations of Tunisian landscapes. Expositions of their works reflected an innocuous approach to representing colonial Tunisia, while the focus on local subjects betrayed hopes to attract a larger Muslim audience.

The Salons de Jeunes Peintres Tunisiens at the Alliance Française of Tunis and the Salons Tunisiens organized by the Institut de Carthage featured the works of

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<sup>199</sup>Report from the Direction des Art Indigène à Sfax, "Exposition de l'aquarelliste Augusta Lama," Article 653, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France; Jean de Maisoneul, "Augusta Lama," Jan. 1, 1943, Article 653, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Nantes, France.

<sup>200</sup> Undated report, "Extraits de compte-rendus sur la peinture d'Augusta Lama," Article 653, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

European artists who had chosen to depict scenes of Tunisian life, the local population, Tunisian landscapes, etc. H el ene Farey, who won the prize for painting at the Salon Tunisien of 1945, was one of the most well-connected members of Tunis’s artistic community.<sup>201</sup> One of her works, *March e   Djerba*, which won the biennial prize of the Soci et e de la France d’Outre-Mer, offers an example of the type of exoticism that characterized the visions of European artists during this period. The painting features a number of locals in traditional dress standing or sitting in small groups in front of the market’s arcades, their dark faces blurred and indistinct. The brightly colored contents of baskets on the ground draw the spectator’s attention to the center of the image, and the branches of a large olive tree in the background twist above the inhabitant’s heads. This portrayal presents a mild exoticism, depersonalizing the Tunisian subjects while calling attention to their brightly colored clothing and food in the setting of a stereotypical oriental *souk*.

In her other works, Farey’s visions of the Tunisian *paysage* supposedly “evoked the typical exoticism of the ‘bled’” while her portrayals of Provence created a sense of nostalgia for the mother country.<sup>202</sup> By far the most popular subject among artists selected for the Salons were Tunisian landscapes, vast, unpopulated, relatively neutral portrayals of the conquered countryside. In official publications as in the Regency’s newspapers, reviewers complimented artists for their interpretations of nature and their skill in capturing the true beauty of the colony.<sup>203</sup> Within exposition spaces, it was common for artists to juxtapose visions of French and Tunisian landscapes, such as Mme.

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<sup>201</sup> Charles Mast to the Contr oleur Civil of Sfax, Oct. 30, 1946, Article 2604, Tunisie Suppl ement au Deuxi eme Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

<sup>202</sup> Claude Choley, “Chronique Artistique,” *La D ep che Tunisienne*, Dec. 25, 1948.

<sup>203</sup> S. Choley, “Chronique Artistique,” *La D ep che Tunisienne*, May 24, 1946.

Peyre who placed paintings of Sidi Bou Saïd and Sidi Driff side by side with portrayals of the French Alps in one 1948 exhibition.<sup>204</sup> Depictions of Sidi-Bou-Saïd, an iconic sea-side town to north of Tunis, appeared in the works of countless European artists during this period. The village's picturesque Arabo-Andalusian architecture and emblematic blue and white colors made it an instantly recognizable symbol of Tunisia's oriental character. Local European landscape painters produced nonthreatening visions of the colony, celebrating natural beauty and harmony in "a Tunisia where the sun is without violence"<sup>205</sup> while continuing to emphasize the oriental qualities of their works. Expositions that placed side-by-side paintings of the French and Tunisian countrysides also suggested to Muslim notables in attendance the cultural links that bound the two nations together.

Perhaps one of the most celebrated European painters to offer a comprehensive vision of the landscapes and local populations of Tunisia, Alexandre Roubtzoff regularly offered his work for display at the Salons Tunisiens and the Salons d'Afrique Française.<sup>206</sup> Born in Saint-Petersburg and naturalized French in 1924, Roubtzoff became Tunisia's Orientalist painter *par excellence*. Having spent the majority of his artistic career in Tunisia, he exemplified the standard approach and vision of many of the Regency's European artists in the late-Protectorate. Speaking of one of his main influences, Baron Rodolphe Erlanger, an important figure in Tunis's artistic community of the 1910's and 1920's, Roubtzoff admired the fact that in his work, "the real Tunisia is represented with dignity, without any trace of conventional orientalism."<sup>207</sup> Roubtzoff

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<sup>204</sup> Claude Choley, "Chronique Artistique," *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, Dec. 9, 1948.

<sup>205</sup> Claude Choley, "Chronique Artistique," *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, Nov. 30, 1949.

<sup>206</sup> Patrick Dubreucq, *Alexandre Roubtzoff (1884-1949): une vie en Tunisie* (Paris: ARC Edition, 1996), 63.

<sup>207</sup> Undated correspondence of Alexandre Roubtzoff, quoted in Dubreucq, 63.

sought a similar aesthetic in his own work, hoping to capture this “real Tunisia” in his depictions of local inhabitants, particularly in the southern region of the colony. He was critical of Western influence in Tunisia, particularly of how it disrupted the traditional Arab way of life.<sup>208</sup>

In many of his paintings and sketches, such as *Oasis de Tozeur* (1933), *Bédouine aux fibules* (1929), and *Scene de vie à Sidi Jab 'r* (1937), Roubtzoff included annotations in Arabic to highlight the local character and affinities of his art. To an extent, his work was free of many of the themes and motifs which characterized earlier periods of Orientalist painting. However, Roubtzoff continued to choose his subjects seemingly on the basis of their exotic characteristics, and his works betray a European gaze focused on the Oriental and simultaneously engaged in the construction of his otherness. In *Scene de vie à Sidi Jab 'r*, Roubtzoff portrays a Tunisian Bedouin in a strikingly primitive setting, her light pink headscarf and blue robe set off against a sparse, gray-brown background.<sup>209</sup> Scattered across the scene, simple, almost indistinguishable utensils suggest a distant way of life, unfamiliar to the artist and his intended audience. While Roubtzoff may have disavowed the Orientalism of the previous generation, his artistic vision was firmly in line with the Bureau's more conciliatory and inclusive approach toward incorporating Tunisian subjects in cultural activities, which nevertheless maintained the old hierarchies by suggesting French superiority. Through state-sponsored expositions, the Bureau celebrated painters such as Roubtzoff for their contributions to the “cultural linkages” between the two nations, a phrase which implied in reality the continued dominance of a European artistic vision, capable of objectifying Tunisian realities in the pursuit of

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 206.

aesthetic and at times political goals. After Roubtzoff's death in 1949, his work continued to be exhibited for several years at the Salons Tunisiens and in the metropole. As one of the most frequently exhibited "local" painters in the Regency, his artistic approach is an example of the subtler Orientalism that characterized the representation of "native" subjects by French artists in Tunisia during this period, and which nonetheless preserved the implied hierarchies of this relationship.

Other metropolitan painters who offered artistic interpretations of Tunisia to the Protectorate's public did not necessarily take Roubtzoff's pains to guard against exoticism. European artists offered patronizing visions of colonized populations, devoid of conflict and ignoring the harsh living conditions under colonialism. Even the art critic of the right-leaning *La Dépêche Tunisienne* acknowledged that one artist's portrayals of Tunisian village life had a nostalgic quality intended to create "a sense of well being" for the European spectator.<sup>210</sup> Another local European painter earned the attention of critics with her portrayals of "obscured souks" and "infinitely charming marabout[s] in the oasis."<sup>211</sup> Exoticism in French art displayed to Protectorate audiences was not limited to the North African context. The work of painter, André Galloux, exhibited in Tunis in 1946 notably contained several landscape scenes composed during the artist's stay in other colonized regions. According to the same reviewer, his visions of the Laotian countryside represented, "joyous and poetical hymns of French Indochina."<sup>212</sup> Harmonious, innocuous portrayals of life under French rule served a double purpose. They suggested the universality of French art, implying that painters could absorb the experiences of local populations into their artistic visions in much the same way that

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<sup>210</sup> S. Choley, "Chronique Artistique," *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, April 26, 1946.

<sup>211</sup> S. Choley, "Chronique Artistique: Les Expositions," *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, Jan. 2, 1946.

<sup>212</sup> S. Choley, "Chronique Artistique," *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, April 25, 1946.

colonial dominance could bring order and civilization to a variety of peoples. While these works represent in part calculated appeals to Muslim elite audiences, they also constitute historical-situated assertions of French cultural identity.

The notion of French culture's capacity to accommodate the lived experiences of diverse colonial subjects was both a foundational precept of French Union ideology and an expression of the worldview held by officials and artists. Choosing among works by contemporary French painters those best suited to both the larger political aims of Protectorate officials and the tastes of the Tunisian public required a constant balancing act on the part of organizers. Reflecting upon the value artistic expositions, Jean Mons stressed that "everything ought to be implemented to strengthen the cultural links between the metropole and the Regency; the taste [sic] of Tunisian elites are particularly directed toward plastic arts."<sup>213</sup> These tastes, whether real or imagined by colonial authorities, led to a number of exhibitions of ceramics and sculpture that used local artisanal production as a point of reference. A 1946 exposition by Elot (Ray Langelot), the then director of glassmaking facilities in Saouaf, stressed the local character of artist's glass and ceramic creations which nevertheless represented "a great step forward for the local craft industry."<sup>214</sup>

Expositions such as Langelot's featuring European crafts or fine arts had their oppositional reference point in the displays of local artisanal work/production which occurred frequently during this period. Craft shows featuring Tunisian traditional arts offered a portrayal the "other," in comparison to which French artistic production took on its full meaning. In the Protectorate, the Office of Tunisian Arts was responsible for

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<sup>213</sup> Louis Periller to M. Salles, Dec. 20 1950, Article 653, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

<sup>214</sup> S. Choley, "Chronique Artistique," *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, July 3, 1946.

establishing standardized models for the production of Tunisian crafts, including pottery, weaving, marquetry, and embroidery.<sup>215</sup> At a 1950 conference on arts and technical education, the Minister of Commerce emphasized the need “to seek out appropriate artistic themes for the artisan and to guide him toward their realization.”<sup>216</sup> Centers for Tunisia Arts provided training to upcoming generations of Tunisian artisans, imposing a policy of strict adherence to these fixed models. Throughout the post-war period, public exhibitions featuring the works of Tunisian artisans from these centers served as a counterpoint for fine arts expositions. By displaying examples of pottery, embroidery, or weaving based on standardized prototypes established by the Office of Tunisian arts, these expositions reinforced the French administration’s claim to have renewed local artistic styles, making their production more efficient while maintaining their traditional character.<sup>217</sup> The annual Expositions of Modern Tunisian Arts were important political events, attended by the Resident General and other high-ranking colonial officials. Organized directly by the Bureau of Public Instruction, these exhibitions displayed updated models for the “classical Tunisian arts” of weaving, pottery, and embroidery, naming the individual whose work best corresponded to the standards as the “Best Tunisian Artisan.”<sup>218</sup> When M. Vergnolle, the president of the National Work Exposition, visited Gabès in 1949 to award members of the regional arts center, he encountered a group of local artisans, “wearing shimmering costumes and magnificent jewels, shouting traditional ‘you you’s while the local notabilities...were presented to M.

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<sup>215</sup> Direction de l’Instruction Publique en Tunisie, *Proces-verbal des journées d’études des arts et techniques d’Afrique du Nord*, May 20, 1950, pg. 19, Sous Dossier 5, Dossier A, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>218</sup> “L’Exposition des Arts Tunisiens a été inaugurée hier,” *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, Dec. 14, 1948.

Vergnolle.”<sup>219</sup> Expositions emphasized both the traditional character of the works on display and the efforts of Protectorate agencies, such as the Office of Tunisian Arts, to carry out “a broad renovation of artisanal professions.”<sup>220</sup> Through standardized models, official expositions, and award ceremonies, French officials appropriated local artistic production, defining which works and styles could be considered “Tunisian.” In the process, they assigned Tunisian artisans a reduced role in the cultural life of the Regency, emphasizing above all the need to make the Tunisian craft industry economically viable. Constrained by a series of French-defined standards, Tunisian traditional arts occupied a subordinate position in relation to European fine arts. They also furnished an oppositional point of reference for French artistic production, defined not by its economic value but in terms of its aesthetic contributions and elevating potential for the Regency’s inhabitants. The name alone of the Office of Tunisian Arts reinforced the tendency to associate France with progress and Tunisia with stagnation suggesting that the “Tunisian Arts” were limited to traditional crafts, themselves outmoded and in need of standardization.

In the final decade of the Protectorate, artistic expositions provided a space for the negotiation and representation of French cultural identity in the light of wartime humiliation, challenges from anti-colonial movements, and the envisioning of a post-colonial relationship by colonial officials. Political goals that involved portraying French culture as dynamic, universal, continuous, unified and superior shaped official decisions to support certain artistic showings. At the same time, numerous expositions cultivated an “Oriental” aesthetic or focused on Tunisian subject matter, reflecting attempts to

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<sup>219</sup> “A Gabès, M. Vergnolle remet leur décoration à six artisans,” *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, Oct. 21, 1949.

<sup>220</sup> “L’Exposition des Arts Tunisiens a été inaugurée hier,” *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, Dec. 14, 1948.

attract larger Muslim elite audiences. To encourage the attachment of elites to French civilization, they proposed reaching out to the “Oriental tastes” of this group while making clear the hierarchical relationship between French and local culture. Muslim notables were given a pivotal role in preserving the “cultural linkages” between France and an independent Tunisia. As one government report confirmed, “Tunisia is concerned with developing elites (whose importance is already far greater than in neighboring countries) who unite Arab and Muslim culture with French and Western culture.”<sup>221</sup> Expositions played an essential role in the Bureau’s policy to maintain the status of French culture among Tunisian elites. Moreover, officials’ notions that French fine arts could serve as the basis for the continued influence of the colonizing power in the affairs of the new nation depended on a conception of French artistic production as inexorably linked to the idea of the French nation itself, indeed, as an expression of the *French génie*.

### **Conclusion**

In 1957, officials at the French Embassy in Tunis began discussing plans for the construction of a cultural center in one of the city’s suburbs. Only months after Tunisians had succeeded in throwing off seventy-five years of French colonial rule, members of the embassy described this center as the key to unlocking a new period of “Franco-Tunisian exchange.”<sup>222</sup> According to the embassy’s records, the center was to be, “above all an

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<sup>221</sup>Report from the Direction de l’Instruction Publique en Tunisie, “Plan Theorique de mise en valeur de la Tunisie, Developpement de l’instruction Publique,” 1950, p. 14, Dossier A, Article 650, VA1, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Nantes, France.

<sup>222</sup> French Embassy in Tunisia, “Perspectives pour la Création d’un Centre Culturel-d’Expressions Française et d’Echanges Franco-Tunisiens,” 1957, Sous-dossier 5, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

instrument for the propagation and maintenance of French culture in Tunisia.”<sup>223</sup> This meant taking responsibility for “spread[ing] French Thought and Culture through all art forms, as modes of expression for the French people, under any guise, from ancient times until today.”<sup>224</sup> In practical terms, officials working at the cultural center would address these aims by organizing conferences, expositions, and performances featuring portrayals of French art and literature. The “means of expression” that they chose had to accurately represent the French *génie*. As the goals set out for Tunis’s cultural center implied, the kind of “exchange” that French officials envisioned with their former colonial subjects would continue to be largely one-sided. Founded immediately after decolonization in Tunisia, this new center’s mission represented a continuation of the cultural policy of the post-WWII period.<sup>225</sup>

The multi-faceted image of French culture presented to Tunisian elites during this period through expositions, conferences, and competitions revealed colonial officials’ particular understanding of contemporary political tensions in the Protectorate, the desirable post-colonial role of the French nation, and their own contextual-based cultural identities. The Bureau of Public Instruction’s cultural strategy aimed at making Tunisian elite’s affinity for French language, art, and literature the basis for continued French influence in the aftermath of independence. In the process, they created terrains (exhibition or conference spaces) for the articulation and representation of a French cultural identity thoroughly shaped by the needs of the colonial situation. By

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<sup>223</sup> French Embassy in Tunisia, “Note relative à la Création d’un Centre Culturel et d’Art Dramatique à Tunis,” 1957, Sous-dossier 5, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

<sup>224</sup> French Embassy in Tunisia, “Perspectives pour la Création d’un Centre Culturel-d’Expressions Française et d’Echanges Franco-Tunisiens,” 1957, Sous-dossier 5, Article 652, Tunisie Deuxième Versement, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France.

<sup>225</sup> The Cultural Center still exists today as a branch of the French Embassy in Tunisia known as the French Institute for Cooperation.

highlighting the universal, superior, dynamic, continuous, diverse, and unified characteristics of the French artistic and literary production, officials formulated a precise and coherent (if contradictory) discourse on what it meant to be culturally French in the colonies and on the advantages offered to Tunisians on the verge of independence. While compelling Muslim elites to assure French culture's place at the heart of national, public life, officials also portrayed Tunisia's Arab-Islamic heritage as belonging to a distant past and incapable of responding to the challenges of modernity. They thus undercut the primary component of the national culture that the Tunisian anti-colonial movement was promoting. Moreover, the representation of French culture in government-sponsored events in Tunisia was tied to a newly developing understanding of France's international status. The French defeat in WWII and the rapid disintegration of France's empire gave rise to the notion that France's international influence could be based on establishing "cultural linkages" both with former colonies and other developing nations. This involved representing French cultural production with all of the abovementioned characteristics while at the same time "wrapping" French propaganda in discussions of local themes to make it more palatable to elites.

It has not been the intention of this study to examine the lasting effects of the Bureau's culture policy on the post-colonial Tunisian elite or the nation in general. However, the long-term impact of this policy on Tunisia constitutes an important subject for future inquiry. The imagining of a post-colonial relationship based on the preservation of colonialism's cultural hierarchies represented a first step in the construction of a cultural neo-colonialism. The following quotation from the Macbride

Commission report, *Many Voices, One World*, serves to put this question into a global perspective:

It has become increasingly clear that the effects of intellectual and cultural dependence are as serious as those of political subjection or economic dependence. There can be no genuine, effective independence without the communication researches needed to safeguard it. The argument has been made that a nation whose mass media are under foreign domination cannot claim to be a nation.<sup>226</sup>

The Macbride Commission's observation suggests that the "cultural dependence" which has persisted in former colonies has complicated national development. In the Tunisian context, this issue has partially played out in debates over Arabization and the continued use of French in the public sphere. In the immediate aftermath of independence, Bourguiba's government established Arabic as the official language but made few attempts to tamper with the existing bilingual education system where French dominated at the secondary level and above.<sup>227</sup> Indeed, for many of the social reforms that Bourguiba imposed during the early years of his rule, he clearly identified the West as the model and outmoded traditional ways of life as an obstacle to Tunisia's transition to modern statehood.<sup>228</sup> In 1958, Mahmoud Messadi, the new Minister of National Education and an enthusiast of French culture, adopted an educational plan that effectively ensured the role of the French language in Tunisian schools.<sup>229</sup> Under Messadi's plan "three times more teaching time was devoted to Western philosophy than to Islamic thought."<sup>230</sup> In 1974, Charles Micaud observed that for the most part French

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<sup>226</sup> International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, *Many Voices, One World: Towards a New, More Just, and More Efficient World Information and Communication Order* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 34.

<sup>227</sup> Perkins, 139.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>229</sup> Charles A. Micaud, "Bilingualism in North Africa: Cultural and Sociopolitical Implications," *The Western Political Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (March 1974), 93.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*

culture continued to have a profound influence on Tunisia's new political elite. This fact played a significant role both in the developmental goals which this group set for nation and in their search for a national identity.<sup>231</sup>

Since independence, Tunisia has also become a member of the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie. At the time of its foundation in 1970, a number of politician and scholars criticized the organization's mission to encourage contacts and cooperation between nations where French language and culture held a privileged position as a cover for France's neocolonial ambitions.<sup>232</sup> As of 2008, the organization claims on its website to facilitate political relations and cooperation between member states "having in common the use of the French language and the respect for universal values."<sup>233</sup> The Alliance Française also continues to pursue its goal of spreading French language and culture world-wide, particularly in former colonies, although it is no longer active in Tunisia. Today, the degree to which French influence plays a role in Tunisia's internal politics remains a subject for debate, although France's long-term involvement with Ben Ali's regime has become increasing evident in the wake of the president's overthrow in January 2011. At the height of the recent revolution, an organization known as l'Association Tunisienne d'Esthétique et de Poïétique released a list of appeals which, considered together, provide a window into Tunisians' continuing search for a cultural identity:

We, the undersigning Tunisian Association of Aesthetics and Poetics, paying tribute to the martyrs of the revolution and being attentive to the will of the people, believe that the revolutionary process for freedom and

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 93-94.

<sup>232</sup> See Guy Martin, "The Historical, Economic, and Political Bases of France's African Policy," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 23, no. 2 (1985): 189-208.

<sup>233</sup> L'Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, "Qui somme-nous?," <http://www.francophonie.org/Qui-sommes-nous.html> (accessed April 14, 2011).

dignity, which began over a month ago, is also a cultural revolutionary process; and accordingly we call for:

1. A democratic and national culture
2. The refusal of a culture of 'folklorization'
3. The protection and promotion of cultural heritage
4. The transparency and visibility of cultural and institutional decisions and projects, especially those of the Ministry of Culture
5. The support and encouragement of free and independent art criticism
6. The encouragement of creation of art journals
7. The abolition of privileges of a minority of cultural actors and the promotion of young artists
8. The support of and listening to cultural and scientific NGOs whose objective is the promotion of artistic creation and culture
9. The sustainable vigilance of civil society for the success of the democratic process.<sup>234</sup>

These demands speak to the ongoing intersection of culture and politics in Tunisian life.

Whatever government manages to take root in Tunisia will undoubtedly be faced with the task of representing a national cultural identity and with the inevitable political implications of the image that it fashions.

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<sup>234</sup> "Tunisia's Cultural Revolution," Nafas Art Magazine, last modified January 2011, [http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/nafas/articles/2011/tunisia\\_cultural\\_revolution](http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/nafas/articles/2011/tunisia_cultural_revolution).

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